



## “Tied to a Boat by the Sound of a Gong”

World, Work and Society Seen through the Work  
Songs of Sichuan Boatmen (1880s – 1930s)

Igor Iwo Chabrowski

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization  
of the European University Institute

Florence, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013



European University Institute  
**Department of History and Civilization**

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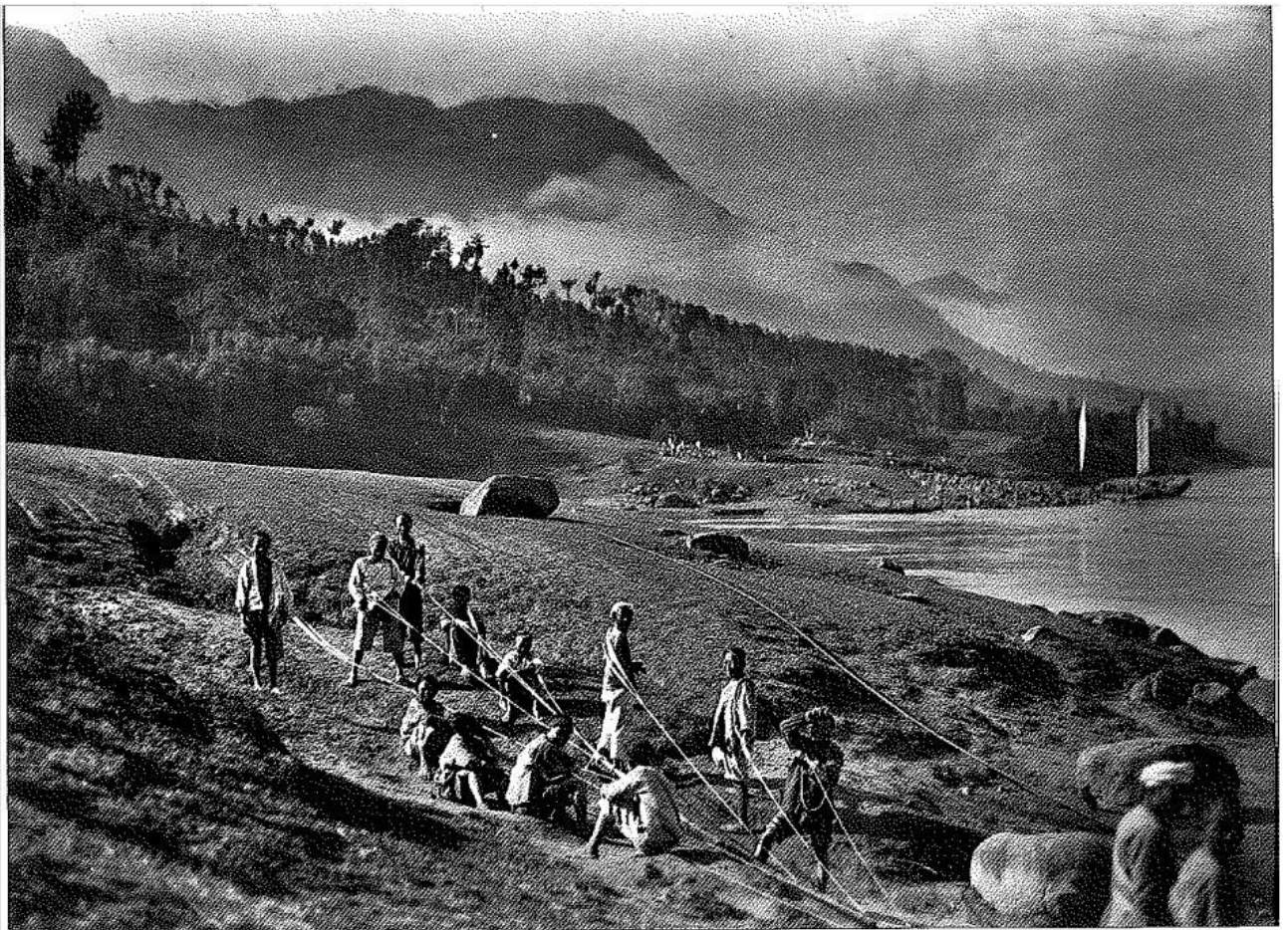


掛子船高夫緯多，珠帘綉柱響綁鑼。

滇黔几日銅鉛到，齊唱宏衣得寶歌。

*A crowd of trackers pinned to the boat; they are like strings with beads moved by the sound of a gong; lead and copper from Yunnan and Guizhou arrives in a few days, their magnificent singing equals a precious dress.*

Gan Bingchang 甘丙昌 (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century)



Poem: Sun Zhongquan 孫忠銓. "Chongqing juan" 重慶卷 in Qiu Liangren 丘良任, Pan Chao 潘超, Sun Zhongquan 孫忠銓, Qiu Jin 丘進, eds. 2007. *Zhonghua zhuzhici quanbian* 中華竹枝詞全編. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe. Volume 6: 555. Translation: Igor Chabrowski.

Picture: Fritz Weiss, Source Wyss, Tamara. 2009. Yesterday in the Land of Ba and Shu: Travels of Hedwig and Fritz Weiss in Southwest China. Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe: 40.

# THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis, based on Eastern Sichuan boatmen's work songs, *haozi*, analyzes the way river workers understood and interpreted the world, work and society that they lived in. Spanning the period between 1880s and 1930s, it explains how such professional groups dealt with the dissolving social and economic order of the late-Qing China and the chaotic republican decades. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part reconstructs the social history of Sichuan boatmen, discusses the methodological issues connected with working on popular song traditions, and explains the importance of work songs as tools of boatmen's work. The second part is devoted to reading, analysis and discussion of these traditions. Three fundamental topics are analyzed in this section: boatmen's understanding of the social world they lived in; the way they perceived their work and the manner in which they comprehended their social position. The thesis demonstrates that boatmen created representations of the Sichuan river towns to claim their own social, cultural and physical spaces. Boatmen largely refused elite aesthetics and shaped their own ones, corresponding to their tastes, habits and forms of socialization. Analyzing the issue of work and labor relations, the thesis demonstrates that boatmen resisted exploitation by stating their moral superiority enshrined in the ideal of brotherhood; and by bemoaning their harrowing labor, cruelty of the bosses and lack of family life. Finally, by examining boatmen's imagination of death, the thesis unveils how culturally potent representations were exploited in order to protest against the social injustice, at the same time expressing vulnerability, weakness and lack of control over one's destiny. The thesis provides us with deeper understanding of the way early twentieth century non-industrial Chinese workers conceptualized their social standing, interpreted surrounding reality and struggled to adjust to oppressive social conditions.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THESIS ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>XIII</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Boatmen – Names .....	5
Popular Culture .....	7
Songs .....	15
Sources of Chongqing and Eastern Sichuan History.....	20
‘Classical Modality’ .....	22
‘Modernizing Modality’ .....	26
‘Foreign Modality’ .....	28
Urbanity and Modernization – Historiography on Chinese Cities.....	32
Thesis Overview.....	38
<b>PART ONE: THE BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: SOCIAL ORIGINS OF SONGS: EASTERN SICHUAN WORKING CLASS, 1880S-1930S</b> <b>.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Social and Economic Basis of the Eastern Sichuan: An Overview .....	42
Repopulation of Sichuan .....	42
Economy and Society .....	46
Workers of Sichuan, an Overview .....	56
Organization of Boatmen Labor: Guilds and Workers of the Rivers .....	57
Guilds.....	59
Procuring Labor .....	64
Secret Society and Employment.....	65
Conditions of River Work and Remuneration .....	67
Wages .....	70
River Workers in the City.....	71
Transportation Guilds in Chongqing.....	73
Urban Life of the Boatmen .....	76
Conclusion .....	80
<b>CHAPTER 2: CHINESE FOLKLORE RESEARCH: EMERGENCE OF FORMS AND</b> <b>UNDERSTANDINGS .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Folklore, New Ideologies and Development of Humanistic Sciences .....	83

An Overview .....	83
Ideology and Achievements .....	86
Politicization of Folklore: The Sino-Japanese War and Maoist Popular Culture .....	93
The Second Life: Folklore and Anthropology After 1976 .....	97
Ideology and Refining of Concepts .....	99
Rethinking the Folksongs .....	102
Current Trends: Folk Songs and Ethnomusicology .....	106
Regional Forms and Haozi – Defining Chinese Work Songs .....	108
Producing Anthologies of Chinese Folklore .....	112
Conclusion .....	118
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE SOUNDS .....</b>	<b>119</b>
Soundscape .....	121
The Form of Haozi .....	127
Classification of Sichuan Haozi .....	133
Communication and Survival .....	140
Conclusion .....	143
<b>PART TWO: SOCIAL SPACES, WORK AND SELF-PERCEPTION .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: MAPPING THE RIVER WORLD .....</b>	<b>147</b>
Mental Mapping, Memory and Sichuan <i>Haozi</i> .....	148
‘Mapping’ the River World .....	151
Constructing the Map .....	151
Picturing the Spaces .....	161
On Cities .....	161
On province .....	174
Chronology, Imagery and Boatmen’s World .....	183
<b>CHAPTER 5: WHERE DO WE BELONG? MEANING OF ONESELF AND ONE’S MENIAL WORK WITHIN SICHUAN SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>195</b>
“Boatmen’s life is a real tragedy” .....	197
Cold, Hunger, Loneliness and Exploitation .....	197
Elders, Marriage, Children as Reasons for Shame .....	203
Laughing at Oneself and Ridiculing Others: The Boatmen’s Sarcastic Vision of Society .....	208
Group Ethos, Brotherhood and Heroism .....	216
Conclusion .....	227

<b>CHAPTER 6 – FEAR OF BEING EATEN. DEATH AS PICTURE OF BOATMEN’S SOCIAL POSITION</b>	
.....	229
Death in Chinese Culture.....	229
Burial and Soul: Overview of the Beliefs .....	232
Death in Eastern Sichuan.....	235
Overview.....	235
Death in Eastern Sichuan Folksongs .....	236
Dying on the River: The Boatmen’s Vision .....	243
Conclusion .....	255
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	257
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	263
Archival sources:.....	263
Recordings .....	263
Letters.....	264
Newspapers and Periodicals .....	264
Films .....	264
Other Sources:.....	265
Secondary Sources: .....	268
Web pages .....	291





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# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a historical analysis of the popular songs of the Sichuan boatmen – workers who transported goods and people on multiple waterways that spanned the province and connected it to the outside world. Sichuan boatmen were a large and rather open group; many of them were professionally engaged in this work, others took it up seasonally, during the slack season. They were an ‘amphibious’ population – living on boats and in the shanty towns outside the city walls and in the river gorges. They moved when hired from one place to another, along river valleys, on the longest routes, such as between Chongqing and Yichang, covering more than six hundred kilometers. Boat workers, being mostly confined to their own narrow group throughout their professional life, developed a particular mentality and forms of culture. This culture found expression through work songs, *haozi* 号子 – an oral tradition which not only enabled performance of coordinated work on the river, but also projected and fortified their system of values and ideas.

The boatmen were not isolated from the other lower class people, such as peasants or petty traders and artisans. Nor were they entirely ignorant of certain cultural orthodoxies manifested by the elites. Their engagement with these cultures as well as with the long historical tradition of the province gives us fascinating insights into their knowledge, understanding and usage of culture. In the same way, the boatmen’s responses and interpretation of their social position were placed both within the Chinese narrative tradition and rendered as direct unique experience. The research presented in this thesis gives us an extremely rare opportunity to access directly the mentality of these Chinese workers. Although Peter Burke has called such enquiry elusive, it nevertheless allows us to see a world of thoughts and ideas impossible to extract from textual sources written by and for the cultural elite.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “[Popular culture] eludes the historian because he is a literate, self-conscious modern man who may find it difficult to comprehend people unlike himself, and also because the evidence for their attitudes and values, hopes and fears is so fragmentary.” Peter Burke. 1978. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row Publishers: 65.

In this thesis, I will analyze the way the culture (narratives, images and representations) served river workers, how it conveyed their worldview and how it provided tools for understanding their work and social position. Five fundamental questions will be addressed in the following pages. How did boatmen construct and relate to the world of Sichuan cities and rivers? To what degree did they integrate with the hegemonic culture of late-imperial China? How did they perceive their work and consequently the social position they occupied? How did they understand and react to the hierarchies that defined their social position? How did they interpret their interaction with the natural world?

Boatmen were typically considered to belong to the bottom of the society. Without a permanent home, stable families and lineages, outside taxation, and on the fringes of the territorially based religious cults, they seemed to be the most pitiful class of China. Analyzing their popular culture, the way they described themselves and the manner in which they juggled and exploited cultural images both of their own and of received provenance, one begins to question such descriptions. River workers refused to be marginalized by laying broad claims to their spaces (both social and geographical); they also rejected their pariah status, picturing themselves on a par with legendary heroes and as embodiments of the moral values of brotherhood and benevolence. At the same time, they understood the difficult and abnormal social standing they occupied. Immersed in excruciating work, difficulties in establishing and maintaining families and frequent accidental deaths they struggled and suffered in order to uphold dignity and to understand their conditions. Overall, these pessimistic voices outweighed the statements of professional pride. Workers found it difficult to nurture self-respect as they did not possess the cultural means to undermine the late-imperial socio-cultural order, in which they firmly believed, long after its demise. This dearth of revolutionary voices is striking, especially in light of the political developments that rocked China from the mid-nineteenth century on. This only attests, however, to the durability of traditional culture in Sichuan and much slower change in economic and social conditions than many Western and Chinese historians would like to accept.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See ex. Frank Dikötter. 2008. *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Frank Dikötter. 2007. *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China*. New York: Columbia University Press. Samuel Y. Liang. 2010. *Mapping Modernity in Shanghai: Space, Gender, and Visual Culture in the Sojourners' City, 1853-1898*. London and New York: Routledge.

The chronological boundaries of this work are set between the 1880s and 1930s. Although most of the studied groups had existed at least since the Song, the structural economic changes that led to a massive growth in local and inter-provincial transportation occurred only by the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, most of the traditions analyzed in these pages, even though largely collected in the 1980s, represent a historical society from this period and their content can be corroborated and validated by other sources from that time. Since traditional transportation was still common till the 1970s, to set a final date in the 1930s may seem somewhat controversial. Nevertheless, considering the enormous changes in all areas of Chinese life that took place during the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945, the Civil War of 1945-1949, and the following almost three decades of Maoism, it seems reasonable to stop at this point.

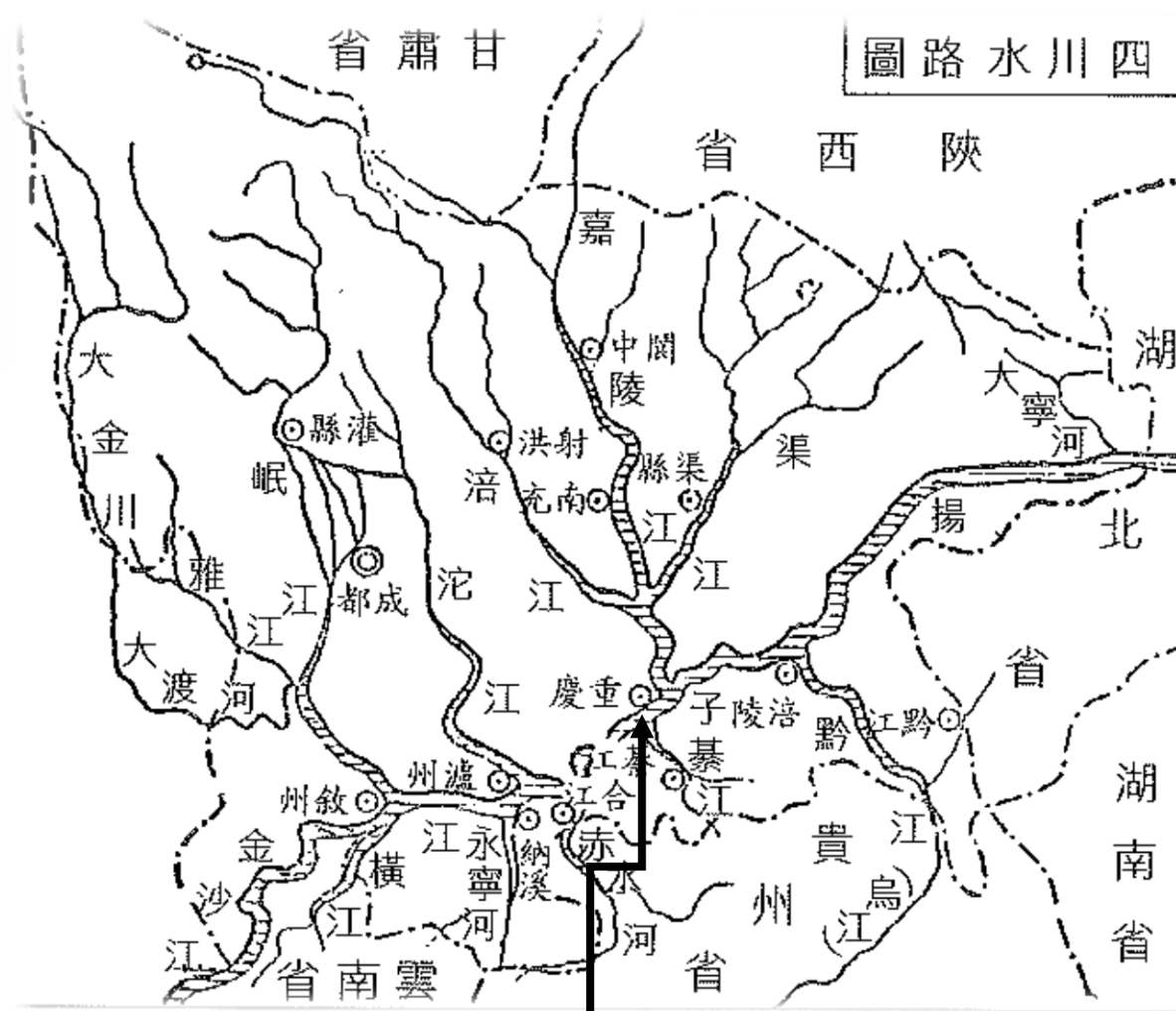


Figure 1: River system of the Sichuan; the arrow marks Chongqing, the city which occupied a central position in the river transportation network of the whole South-Western region of China. Source: Wang Di 王笛. 2002. *Kuachu fengbide shijie, Changjiang xiayou quyu shehui yanjiu (1644-1911)* 跨出封閉的世界，長江下游區域社會研究 (1644-1911). Taipei: Wunan tushu chubanshe gongsi: 37.

The geographical scope of this work is Eastern Sichuan, an area which roughly corresponds to the Qing-era Eastern Sichuan Circuit (Chuandong dao 川東道), the highest sub-provincial authority centered at Chongqing. For economic and social reasons we can also call it the Chongqing area, pointing to the central position of this city in the trade and transportation network of Sichuan. For our purpose it is much more helpful to understand this area as a river network of the upper Yangzi tributaries such as the Jialing River 嘉陵江, Min River 岷江, Wu River 烏江, Tuo River 沱江, Jinsha River 金沙江 and Fu River 涪江. The six mentioned rivers create a water system that drains to the Yangzi. The Yangzi, on its part, runs eastward crossing the mountainous region of Three Gorges after which it enters the marshy flatland of today's Hubei province. The six main rivers are not the only waterways on which existed the boat traffic – many smaller streams were also important areas of settlement and thus were connected through traditional boats with other urban centers in Sichuan (see: Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

Since the rivers of Sichuan provide drainage both for the waters amassed in the Tibetan plateau during the spring melting and for the substantial sub-tropical precipitation characteristic of this region, they stand out because of the high variation in a seasonal water level. Historically, these conditions caused frequent flooding of inhabited river valleys and a lot of problems with maintaining year-round river connections between urban centers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Zhou Lisan, He Xuetao and Chen Siqiao in their 1946 *Economic Atlas of Sichuan* list two main rivers: Jinsha (from Sijiaoying 石角營 through Pingshan 屏山 to Yibin 宜賓) and Yangzi (from Yibin though Chongqing to the – border between Sichuan and Hubei, ChuanEjie 川鄂界). Of smaller rivers, there were 19 tributaries to Yangzi; Drainage basin of Jialing consisted of 13 streams, of Fu 6 streams, Min 13 streams; Tuo 8 streams; Wu 3 streams; and You (Youshui 酉水) also 3 streams. Zhou Lisan 周立三, Hou Xuetao 侯學燾, Chen Siqiao 陳泗橋. October 1946. *Sichuan jingji dituji shuoming* 四川經濟地圖集說明. Beibei: Zhongguo dili yanjiusuo: 118-123.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent work on Sichuan geography and environment is Sichuansheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui bianzuan 四川省地方志編纂委員會編纂. 1996. *Sichuanshengzhi: Dilizhi* 四川省志: 地理志. Chengdu: Chengdu ditu chubanshe. See also: Sun Jingzhi, Sun Pan-shou, et al. 1962. *Economic Geography of Southwest China: Szechwan, Kweichow, Yunnan*. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Commerce, Office of Technical Services, Joint Publication Research Services. Wang Di 王笛. 2002: 17-32. Wei Yingtao 隗瀛濤, ed. 1991. *Jindai Chongqing chengshi shi* 近代重慶城市史. Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe: 50-52. Zhou Yong 周勇. 2002. *Chongqing tongshi* 重慶通史. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe: 3-5. Wang Di provides also a short description of natural hazards and disasters in the region throughout the Qing. A short description in English of Sichuan environment is provided by Richard von Glahn: Richard von Glahn. 1987. *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Apart from differences in summer and winter water levels, the rivers of Sichuan run through a mountainous environment, which affects not only the speed of the current but also the shape of river valleys. All the streams in Eastern Sichuan cut deep into the land structure of the region creating sharp bends, broad shoals, and frequent rapids, sometimes of monumental sizes as in the Yangzi Gorges. All these elements created additional difficulties for the boatmen and defined the difficulty of their work. Moreover, most river bottoms are laid with massive rock formations splitting the main current into a number of smaller streams, which during the low-water season need to be navigated around, whereas with high water they are submerged, thus providing for additional danger to the passing boats. As the focus of this thesis is on the boatmen and the way they coped and understood their life and work on the waters of Sichuan, these are the river-ways that determine the geographical scope. In fact these were the rivers that defined boatmen's social and economic position as much as an interaction with this environment gave foundation to their culture.<sup>5</sup>

## Boatmen – Names

The main protagonists of this thesis are Eastern Sichuan boatmen, the group which produced the richest tradition of work songs, to which we thus have easiest access and which certainly produced one of the most fascinating workers' cultures in China. Boatmen is a general name for people who in various periods and according to various writers were called *shuishou* 水手, *qianfu* 繙夫 or *yeshou* 曳手, all denoting trackers (boat pullers), *chuangong* 船工 meaning boat workers, or *shuifu* 水夫 – water laborers, or *chuanfu* 船夫 – boat laborers. Throughout the sources I consulted, this division did not imply differences in status or profession but rather a function occupied by a particular worker during the time of observation. Also, each of these names is connected with different observers. *Shuifu*,

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<sup>5</sup> Possessing a detailed knowledge of the rivers in the region was among the most fundamental elements of government in this part of the province. This point is sustained by thorough descriptions of rapids, stations and seasonal transportation in county gazetteers such as: Wang Erjian 王爾鑑, Qianlong 21<sup>st</sup> year (1761) *Baxianzhi* 乾隆二十一年巴縣志 (1761), Di yi juan (1) 第一卷: jiangyu 疆域: shanchuan 山川. Further as: *Baxianzhi*, 1761. A compilation of all knowledge on Chongqing waterways was published in a 1939 *Ba County Gazetteer*: Wang Jianqing 王鑑清 and Xiang Chu 向楚. 1939 (1967). *Baxian xianzhi* 巴縣縣志. Reprint. Taipei: Sichuan wenxian yanjiushe 四川文獻研究社, Taiwan xuesheng shuju: 161-197. Further as: *Baxianzhi*, 1939.

*shuishou* and *qianfu* can be associated with classical writing about the Yangzi region and existed as a name for river workers during the Qing.<sup>6</sup> It also seeped into nineteenth and twentieth century Japanese writing and is visible in consular reports for the epoch. *Yeshou* I have met almost only in Japanese classification of river labor. *Qianfu* is the most common name currently used in denoting Sichuan boat pullers, or trackers, and *chuanfu* appears in more general descriptions of this profession. *Chuangong* in more recent (1980s and 1990s) publications denoted Sichuan boatmen as workers in a Marxist classification of social classes. The usage of character *gong* 工, however, can be antedated to the 1930s and the first social surveys of Sichuan conducted by the Bank of China in Chongqing and published in a journal called *Sichuan Monthly* (*Sichuan yuebao* 四川月報). It also appeared occasionally in the work songs; in fact, it is hard to determine the connotations of this word, whether it was common in speech in the period of our interest or was imposed later through widespread use in the lifetime of the contributors to folklore collections.

The English word ‘boatman’ is very general and according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary encompasses all possible types of work related to boats.<sup>7</sup> ‘Tracker’ was a popular word for describing boat pullers or boat haulers (*qianfu*, *yeshou* etc.) and most probably used only in China. According to Carl Crow (1884-1945), an American businessman who resided in Shanghai from 1911 till 1937, this word was idiosyncratic to the Pidgin English of the open-port communities in pre-1949 China.<sup>8</sup> Due to its widespread and early appearance

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<sup>6</sup> For example in the poem of Gong Weihuan 龔維翰 (Qing, n.d.) we can find a form “*raoqian zhu zhu fuzi*” (撓繚諸夫子): “all rowers and trackers”, see: Sun Zhongquan 孫忠銓. “Chongqing juan” 重慶卷 in Qiu Liangren 丘良任, Pan Chao 潘超, Sun Zhongquan 孫忠銓, Qiu Jin 丘進, eds. 2007. *Zhonghua zhuzhici quanbian* 中華竹枝詞全編. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe. Volume 6: 526. Further as: *Zhuzhici*. Ba County Gazetteer from 1761 uses the name *shuishou*: *Baxianzhi*, 1761, juan 3, yanfazhi 鹽法志 [salt regulations].

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boatman>.

<sup>8</sup> Letter of Fritz Weiss to Erich Moritz von Hornbostel (1877-1935): “Tracker nennt man hier im englischen Jargon die chinesischen Kulis, die von Ichang an bis Chungking hinauf und weiter auf dem Yangtse und seinen Nebenflüssen die schwerfälligen Dschunken über die Stromschnellen bringen, aus denen der obere Yangtse im Gegensatz zu seinem Unterlauf sich leider grösstenteils zusammensetzt.” Phonogramm-Archiv Ethnologisches Museum Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Walzensammlung Fritz Weiss Westchina, Weiss 1912, 1913-14, Westchina + Südchina, Kopien und Material, Chengtu, 28/5 12, Szuchuan W. China. About Pidgin English of China open ports see: Carl Crow. 2007 [1940] *Foreign Devils in the Flowery Kingdom*. Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books: xiii-xv, 30-32. *Qianfu* or *tracker* poses certain problems as comparable profession in Europe existed probably only in Russia (*burlak* бurlак). Late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Isabella Bird) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (H. G. Woodhead) English speaking writers all used the word ‘tracker.’ Such a translation also appears in Wu Guanhua 吳光華, ed. 2002. *Hanying dacidian* 漢英大辭典. Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, Vol. 2: 2013.



in sources (at least from the 1880s), as well as the lack of any suitable English language alternative, throughout the thesis I am going to use such forms as ‘trackers’, ‘trackers and rowers’, ‘boatmen’, or ‘Sichuan boatmen’.

## Popular Culture

Boatmen work songs and stories were an element of Chinese popular culture. The very general character of this category requires us to reflect a little what it implies to classify this specific genre within popular culture. How can we understand this category and what can we derive from such classification? What problems are associated with researching popular culture and what questions arise from academic engagement with it?

Dominic Strinati, summarizing the main strands developed in the historiography of popular culture, outlined some major issues involved in this type of research. The questions he put forward focused on the origins of popular culture:

Where does popular culture come from? Does it emerge from the people themselves as an autonomous expression of their interests and modes of experience, or is it imposed from above by those in position of power as a type of social control? Does popular culture rise up from the people ‘below’, or does it sink down from elites ‘on high’, or is it rather a question of an interaction between the two?<sup>9</sup>

The main issue raised by Strinati was how power relations within the society influenced the development of popular culture. In other words whose message and whose interests were voiced through this culture? He proposed three scenarios in relation to such cultural expression. It could be an experience of the people, a means of suppressing people or a field of interaction between various layers of society and political power. Strinati pointed out that the main debates in the field of popular culture underlined the ideological stakes in this field, considering that it could have a role in the exercise of power by privileged social groups. In the same way it could be a field of contestation and resistance to such pressures from the

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<sup>9</sup> Dominic Strinati. 1995. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge: 3.

top of the social ladder. In this way, we may reflect how, even in a highly discrete manner, popular culture can be a mode of subverting the dominant forms of culture.<sup>10</sup>

To work through these questions, we should search for a workable definition of culture and examine whether such divisions between ‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’ or ‘high’ and ‘low’ can serve us in our inquiry into boatmen’s mentality. Peter Burke, in his now classic study, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, stated that:

“Culture” is an imprecise term, with many rival definitions; mine is ‘a system of shared meanings, attitudes, and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artifacts) in which they are expressed or embodied’. Culture in this sense is a part of a total way of life but is not identical with it. As for popular culture, it is perhaps best defined initially in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the ‘subordinate classes’ as Gramsci called them.<sup>11</sup>

Following the precept of Antonio Gramsci’s (1891-1937) approach to studying the history of popular culture, Burke emphasized the unequal power relations that existed and exist within societies, where elite producers of cultural models disseminate their meanings in order to maintain the stability of economic, social and political relations.

Burke, however, paid close attention to the complicated nature of these relations, leaving no doubt that any simplified categorization of the “popular” would not find confirmation when examined across historical sources. The “higher” and “lower” orders of culture, or “great tradition” and “little tradition” (Burke refers here to [Robert] Redfield’s model) needed restatement, since in the Early Modern Europe of his interest, no neat parallel existed between social classes and represented orders of culture. Thus:

[t]he elite participated in the little tradition, but the common people did not participate in the great tradition. This asymmetry came about because the two

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<sup>10</sup> Scholars pointed to the importance of struggle and domination especially when discussing industrial mass culture, which rendered people culturally passive and consumerist. These theories were not free from criticism which found them oversimplified, elitist and lacking understanding of unique products within popular culture. Ibid: 6-7, 10-21, 38-49. Marxists, especially Gramsci and his followers, were strong proponents of the conflict-based nature of popular culture, its roots in the hegemony of one class over the others. According to Strinati, the main problem with their theory was assuming that all social control has to be rooted in cultural hegemony and acceptance of social order. Another problem of Gramscian theory is its reliance on “economic or class reductionism” – finding the causes of all historical issues in class struggle. Ibid: 130-176.

<sup>11</sup> Burke: xi.

traditions were transmitted in different ways. The great tradition was transmitted formally at grammar schools and at universities. It was a closed tradition in the sense that people who had not attended these institutions, which were not open to all, were excluded. In a quite literal sense, they did not speak the language. The little tradition, on the other hand, was transmitted informally. It was open to all, like church, the tavern and the market-place, where so many of the performances occurred.<sup>12</sup>

The divide between these two cultures was that of the language in which each of them functioned. Whereas the “elite” could move freely inside the conceptual realm of the “common people” the latter’s access to elite discourse was barred. This language barrier was not only social but also geographical and temporal, affecting the scope and possibilities of recording and transmitting traditions across time. Additionally, although both commoners and elite participated in the lower culture, their approach to it was different. As Burke stated: “[f]or the elite, but for them only, the two traditions had different psychological functions; the great tradition was serious, the little tradition was play.”<sup>13</sup>

A number of studies in the field of Chinese popular culture, conducted mostly from the mid-1980s, have shown that many of the theoretical guidelines developed in studying European conditions found confirmation in late-imperial China. Even though we should be cautious about adopting theoretical frameworks across such diverse fields, it was nevertheless proven that differences related more often to the field of technical dissemination of culture than to the relations between hegemonic culture and popular culture. As delineated by Evelyn S. Rawski, Chinese society was affected by the development and spread of print culture correlating with urban revolution and the monetization of market exchange at the lowest levels of the economic ladder from at least the Song dynasty.<sup>14</sup> Chinese printing, due to technological reasons, was much cheaper than its European counterpart, which served to further broaden and deepen dissemination of elite cultural models.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Burke: 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: op. cit.: 28. See also: Calro Ginzburg. 1992 (1976). *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press: xix-xxiv.

<sup>14</sup> Evelyn S. Rawski. “Economic and Social Foundations of Late Imperial China” in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, Evelyn S. Rawski. 1985. *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 17-28.

<sup>15</sup> Rawski: 28-33.

The social distinctions in Chinese society relating to participation in culture, even though they can broadly be divided into “higher” and “lower” have undergone further scrutiny from David Johnson. Johnson, evading the theoretical question of definition, set about analyzing popular culture as a social phenomenon linked to literacy and legal privilege. In a manner not dissimilar to Burke, he postulated that participation in the “high” culture or “elite” culture was not immediately congruent with belonging to the official or literary class. In fact, at almost any social level there existed a degree of engagement with elite culture. Johnson claimed that:

[...] it must be clear why scholars have in the past found it so difficult to frame satisfactory definitions of “popular culture” and “elite culture.” After all, at least three very different kinds of people are included in what is ordinarily thought of, in a vague way, as “the elite”: classically educated men with the legal privileges of gentry status; the less well educated wives and mothers of such men; and classically educated commoners. If, in any effort to limit the scope of the term, we define “elite” as “ruling class,” then we exclude commoners to whom the whole literary tradition was open and who may have been extremely creative writers and thinkers. If we define “elite” in terms of education or mastery of the literary tradition, narrowing it in a different way, then we must include in it some men who were of little consequence socially or politically. And, of course, the term “popular culture” presents even harder problems: under it are subsumed four or five groups – or more, it [*sic!*] we take regional differences into account. I am not arguing that the terms “popular culture” and “elite culture” should be abandoned – in fact, they are probably indispensable. But if we use these terms without a full awareness of the complex social realities that they denote, they will only create confusion.<sup>16</sup>

As we can see, his definition was largely based on the idea of the involvement of various social participants in popular culture, without providing an explanation of what it consisted of. We can only assume that he subscribed to the rather descriptive definition proposed in

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<sup>16</sup> David Johnson. “Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*: 67-68.

the “Preface” to the volume, namely “an enormous range of phenomena, from domestic architecture to millenarian cults, from irrigation techniques to shadow plays.”<sup>17</sup>

Following this point, Johnson *et al.* posited that Chinese popular culture was “integrated” into elite culture to a much greater extent than that of its European counterpart. The authors of *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* emphasized this process by underlining the broad dissemination of Confucian values through print and education, even among the rural population.<sup>18</sup> This “integration” poses, however, serious theoretical and empirical problems. Early on, Evelyn S. Rawski put forward the theory that a basic level of education in China was much more widespread than it is commonly assumed, to the extent that in the 1920s more than 40% of the urban male population had some reading and writing skills.<sup>19</sup> To support such a high figure of relatively educated people, she gathered evidence of activities such as cheap printing, cheap village schools, and the existence of primers and almanacs simply directed at giving practical vocabulary.<sup>20</sup> A relatively high level of literacy, however, neither greatly supports the concept of unity in the area of values or cultural imagery, nor is free of doubt. Wilt L. Idema demonstrated that Rawski defined literacy on a very low level (few hundred characters) and that she overestimated the reach and success rate of traditional schooling methods.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Rawski underlined that there was a sharp difference in literacy skills between the classically educated elites (examination candidates) and the common people. The latter existed within the realm of the practical (objects, numbers) rather than the abstract (concepts, moral values), and popular almanacs reveal a strong domination of everyday vocabulary.<sup>22</sup>

Assuming a high literacy level, therefore, does not automatically allow us to presume a unity of culture and thus a lack of conflict between power-holders and their subordinates. With an overwhelming majority of people able to independently use sophisticated written material,

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<sup>17</sup> *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*: x.

<sup>18</sup> Victor H. Mair. “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularization of the *Sacred Edict*” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*: 325-359. James L. Watson, “Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T’ien Hou (“Empress of Heaven”) Along the South China Coast, 960-1960” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*: 292-324

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn S. Rawski. 1979. *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch’ing China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 10-18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 81-139.

<sup>21</sup> Wilt L. Idema. “Review of Education and Popular Literacy in Ch’ing China by Evelyn Sakakida Rawski,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 66, Livr. 4/5 (1980): 314-324.

<sup>22</sup> Rawski, 1979: op. cit.

in no way can we assume that culture disseminated through the written word was the culture of the common people. This point was picked up by Anna E. McLaren who claimed that popular printing technology produced rather a process of cultural negotiation among literate classes than one of integration. So, in contrast to Europe during the Reformation, Chinese readers did not participate in the main eschatological discussions of their times, being more or less ignorant of them.<sup>23</sup> A few years earlier, R. David Arkush had also underlined the negotiated character of Chinese culture as exemplified in the countryside. In fact, in this largely illiterate environment, Confucian or “orthodox” views were often manipulated or rejected: “the evidence from proverbs seems to show that peasant acceptance of orthodox values and beliefs was limited, somewhat grudging, and mixed with feelings of cynicism about Confucian moralism.”<sup>24</sup> Multiple studies on popular literature and religion underscore the same point – literary expressions, religious beliefs and ritual practices existed in multiple versions and corresponded to the needs of various social groups.<sup>25</sup> They were as much fields of struggle between the ruling classes (court, literati) and commoners as a field of exchange and mutual inspiration, sometimes becoming legitimizing practices for the privileged groups within the society.<sup>26</sup>

These observations on literacy are important for our understanding of popular culture and, more particularly, of Sichuan boatmen’s work songs. As we are going to see, the cultural expression of boatmen was confined only to oral arts – singing, proverbs, short narratives etc. Nevertheless, they were not alien to a broader realm of narratives and values, which originated in and were transmitted through the means of writing. Such dissemination could

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<sup>23</sup> Anne E. McLaren. 1998. *Chinese Popular Culture & Ming Chantefables*. Leiden, Netherlands and Boston, MA: Brill: 1-14.

<sup>24</sup> R. David Arkush. “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century Chinese Peasant Proverbs” in Kwang-Ching Liu, ed. 1990. *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 331.

<sup>25</sup> And others. Novels and popular religion were interlinked: Duara, Shahar, Seaman, Von Glahn etc.

<sup>26</sup> Guo Qitao. 2005. *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. On Daoji 道濟 (also called Jidian 濟顛, Jigong 濟公) and theoretical discussion of the novel’s role in spreading religious cults, see: Meir Shahar. 1998. *Crazy Ji: Chinese Popular Religion and Popular Literature*. Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press. On Guandi 關帝 see: Prasenjit Duara. “Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Nov., 1988): 778-795. On Tianhou 天后 see: James L. Watson. “Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T’ien Hou (“Empress of Heaven”) Along the South China Coast, 960-1960” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*: 292-324. On Zhenwu 真武 see: Gary Seaman. 1987. *Journey to the North: An Ethnohistorical Analysis and Annotated Translation of the Chinese Folk Novel Pei-yu Chi*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1-39.

have multiple origins, but due to a lack of sources we can only extrapolate through comparison with other working class groups or through careful reading of the songs. Certainly some boatmen received a degree of elementary level schooling; others were illiterate, but due to contacts with both urban and rural environments, by attending religious festivals, temple fairs and listening to Sacred Edict lectures and storytelling they were immersed in the local world of fictional, historical and moralizing narratives. Finally, as skillfully pointed out by one of the greatest aficionados of boatmen's culture, Shen Congwen 沈從文 (who researched the boatmen's communities of Western Hunan) local sing-song girls and prostitutes often entertained male workers with traditional and fashionable tunes.<sup>27</sup>

The problem of literacy and influence of the literate milieu on oral culture is as irresolvable as it is pointless. We need to remember the influence of the literati and the hegemonic culture on the oral culture. Additionally, we need to point out, following Burke, that the "popular" is always "elusive" as it needs to be somewhat artificially extracted from a broad pool of culture, and that it is, in any case, obtained by historians through reading not listening to the past oral traditions.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, much less difference existed between Europe and China. In both cases the voice of commoners is read from texts prepared and consumed by the literate, elite members. Moreover, at no historical moment did "the popular" advance an independent claim, but was almost always transmitted and processed through elite agents who by engaging with it, addressed their own political and cultural agendas. As is going to be clear in the following chapters, the only access we have to the realm of commoners' mentality is through the writing and research conducted either to denigrate or to understand the people.

In the light of the sources analyzed in this thesis, it will become fairly clear that we should distance ourselves from the notion of "integration" endorsing instead ideas of negotiation and conflict between elite and popular spheres of culture. In no way does it appear that commoners, and in the case of my research, Sichuan boatmen, were merely passive recipients of official or elite ideology, with its emphasis on institutionalized religious and

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<sup>27</sup> Shen Congwen 沈從文. 1960. *Xiangxing sanji* 湘行散記. Hong Kong (Xianggang): Wenli chubanshe: 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Burke: 65-87.

social values, images and hierarchies.<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that ancestor worship, social hierarchy, communal religion and rules defining kinship were unknown or directly challenged through boatmen's culture. I would rather claim that they were variously appropriated (de Certeau's notion), hijacked, reused, manipulated and adjusted according to the local and temporal needs of the river workers.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, orthodox ideology assailed the boatmen, not to the same extent as de Certeau's modern consumers, but sufficiently for them to become, in their voice of protest against their disadvantageous social position, defenders (however lukewarm) of the moral elements that defined human dignity and opposed blunt exploitation. In this way, paradoxically perhaps, the boatmen defended an imperial order of culture long after elites found it defunct. We also need to admit that the popular culture of Sichuan boatmen, as so many other cultures in China, did not exist as an autonomous unit, but *took place* in relation to a whole variety of pressures. These pressures were coming equally from imperial literati, local historical traditions, and socio-economic conditions, as well as from researchers, folklorists and ethnographers who classified, organized and codified the culture. Throughout the following chapters these agencies are going to be constantly referred to, whereas Chapter 2 will be exclusively devoted to the role of Chinese ethnography in the production of popular culture.

None of the above, however, means to say that popular culture was the sole creation of any of these influences, but rather that it was an outcome of action and negotiation, struggle and adjustment, undertaken in changing conditions and by heterogeneous participants congregated to perform a profession at a particular time of history. Moreover, the local agency of the commoner faced with such overwhelming forces could too easily be overlooked. Yet Sichuan boatmen's culture, in a splendid way illustrates the complexity of the relations between elite and popular – boatmen's work songs were fundamental for the existence of the profession. As Chapter 3 and partially Chapter 4 will show, they served as tools for organizing work, markers and warnings during dangerous passages, harmonizing movement when extra effort was necessary, as well as mapping and remembering ways through the complex river system. They created a sound system in which a meaning could be

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<sup>29</sup> For a basic definition of orthodoxy, see: Kwang-Ching Liu. "Introduction: Orthodoxy in Chinese Society" in *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*: 1-24.

<sup>30</sup> Michel de Certeau. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press: 8-12, 18-19, 26, 37.



interjected and boatmen's ideas voiced, repeated and enforced. The songs were necessary and existed indivisibly with the river work.<sup>31</sup> It was their meaning, more than anything else that provided a field in which all pressures were intertwined, where hegemonic and popular claims asserted themselves. It is by focusing on this area that we will see popular culture and notably the culture of boatmen not just as an over-generalized culture of the lower classes, but as an outcome of interaction, a product of historical conditions, and a response to changes that affected and reshaped Sichuan in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

## Songs

The story of the songs requires a few words. They developed together with the boatmen as tools for their work and a means of group integration, later being taken up by folklorists and turned into objects of study, classification and interpretation.<sup>32</sup> During the reform era (esp. from the late 1990s) songs reemerged, no longer as an element of one professional group's heritage, but as a national and regional cultural product. They were appropriated by the new political center of Chongqing Municipality (Chongqingshi 重慶市) in order to construct a distinctive local culture integrated into the framework of a whole encompassing Chinese culture as an "intangible heritage".<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the rapidly expanding local tourist industry participated in returning songs to prominence by making them attractive, accessible and 'suitable for' the broader middle class tastes of the *gaige kaifang* 改革開放 ("reform and opening") generations of consumers.

These top-down initiatives, together with the total demise of traditional river work techniques by the late 1970s, ultimately broke the link between the boatmen and their culture. Paradoxically, this break brought to our eyes the workers' traditions, which although

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<sup>31</sup> Here I agree with the point made by Ted Gioia who claimed that there was no division between work and the song that accompanied it, thus we cannot approach work songs as a form of art performed only for the aesthetic pleasure of the audiences. Ted Gioia. 2006. *Work Songs*. Durham: Duke University Press: 8-12.

<sup>32</sup> Tong Lam connects the need for classification and categorization to the contingency arising from state-building process undertaken by statesmen and intellectuals in the last years of the Qing and during the Republic. Tong Lam. 2011. *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 50-74.

<sup>33</sup> Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan 中國非物質文化遺產, position: 055, Chuanjiang haozi 川江號子, classification: "folk/popular music" (minjian yinyue 民間音樂); area: Chongqing and Sichuan 重慶, 四川, number (bianhao 編號): II-24; [http://www.ihchina.cn/inc/guojiaminglunry.jsp?giml\\_id=055](http://www.ihchina.cn/inc/guojiaminglunry.jsp?giml_id=055).

previously seen, had never seriously been collected or engaged with. A visible change in the spatial, sonic and kinesthetic characteristics that had defined the region for three centuries, spurred a frenzy of research into the vanished social and cultural vestiges of the past. Not differing much from their nineteenth century counterparts in Europe, Chinese folklorists, ethnographers and aficionados of local history, motivated equally by sentimental as scientific reasons, launched into recording and reconstructing the past as a memorial for future generations. The outcome of these efforts was the recovery of one of the most unique and richest collections of work songs in China. Two major projects, of collection and publication, *Zhongguo geyao jicheng Chongqingshi juan* 中國歌謠集成重慶市卷 from 1989 and more recently *Chuanjiang haozi* 川江號子 (2007) have given us hundreds of songs.<sup>34</sup> Supported by many other publications ranging from multi-tome general publications such as *Sichuan sheng zhi* 四川省志 (1992) to a monographic collection of folklore such as *Ba Yu minjian wenxue huicui* 巴渝民間文學薈萃 (1992) or publications on Chongqing toponyms, we are able to engage with Sichuan popular culture to an unprecedented degree.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, since the profession of boatmen disappeared (in its last vestiges) more than four decades ago, it was impossible for me to conduct any interviews or hear and see boatmen in their work.

This proliferation of sources, however, does not leave us in an easy position. Oral tradition 'stabilized' in the form of script and stripped of its performative, social and historical elements, is, as Richard Bauman and many later scholars emphasized, just a mere shadow of the original.<sup>36</sup> The task I also undertake in this thesis is to locate this popular culture within

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<sup>34</sup> Nie Yunlan 聶雲嵐, Peng Weijin 彭維金, He Dashun 賀大舜, eds. 1989. *Zhongguo geyao jicheng Chongqingshi juan* 中國歌謠集成重慶市卷. Chongqing: Kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe Chongqing fenshe. Further as: ZGYJC. Duan Ming 段明 and Hu Tiancheng 胡天成. 2007. *Chuanjiang haozi* 川江號子. Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe. Further as: *Chuan*.

<sup>35</sup> Jin Xiangming 金祥明, Zhong Youling 鐘游玲, Ran Zhuang 冉庄, Yang Zhongjin 楊忠全, eds. 1992. *Ba Yu minjian wenxue huicui* 巴渝民間文學薈萃. Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe. Further as: *Ba Yu*. Peng Botong 彭伯通. 1981. *Gucheng Chongqing* 古城重慶. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe. Peng Botong. 2001. *Chongqing diming qutan* 重慶地名趣談. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe.

<sup>36</sup> He stipulated that following elements are fundamental in understanding oral art: "1. special codes, e.g. archaic or esoteric language, reserved for and diagnostic of performance [...]; 2. special formulae that signal performance, such as conventional openings and closings, or explicit statements announcing or asserting performance [...]; 3. figurative language, such as metaphor, metonymy, etc. [...]; 4. formal stylistic devices, such

the milieu of local elite tradition as well as within social and economic change taking place during a defined historical period. Only such an approach allows us to engage with boatmen's culture and understand it within a broader popular culture of the lower classes in late-imperial and republican China.

To look at the period when these popular traditions belonged solely to the workers and thus to move the clock backwards from the period of collectors and classifiers is a difficult task, and it cannot be expected that the outcome will mirror perfectly the historical reality of popular culture. This cannot be achieved and we will necessarily need to put up with a degree of discomfort. Yet, the songs or stories, in a form accessible to us, do not stand alone as the only remnants of the Sichuan people's past. We can trace and analyze a range of material by carefully reading and cross checking among the rich writings of often casual observers. Literati travelers and poets, gazetteer compilers, local historians and geographers, travel writers, adventurers, officials, journalists etc. both Chinese and Western rarely failed to jot down a few words especially on the remarkable boatmen – people their lives depended on as they traveled up the difficult currents of Sichuan rivers. It is in fact the knowledge we have of 'higher' culture that allows us to engage with boatmen's songs.

Through reading, comparing and searching for sources of images and information (religious, historical, geographic etc.) we can appreciate the originality of this strain of Sichuan tradition, its response to and appropriation of hegemonic models, its power of choice and infusion of content into models meant for a different purpose. Additionally, revision of the social and economic conditions of the province in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, based on the fairly rich descriptive and quantitative data from the period, allows us also to understand the social meaning conveyed by songs. We can thus strip away stereotypical interpretations of pre-1949 popular culture seen as a voice of protest against class exploitation, an early call for revolution.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, we can reconstruct the way

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as rhyme, vowel harmony, other forms of parallelism [...]; 5. special prosodic patterns of tempo, stress, pitch [...]; 6. special paralinguistic patterns of voice quality and vocalization [...]; 7. appeal to tradition [...]; disclaimer of performance [...].” Richard Bauman. “Verbal Art as Performance” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 77, No. 2 (June, 1975): 295. See also: Vibeke Børdahl. “The Storyteller’s Manner in Chinese Storytelling,” *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2003): 65-112. John Miles Foley. 2002. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. Leo Tak-hung Chan. “Text and Talk: Classical Literary Tales in Traditions China and the Context of Casual Oral Storytelling,” *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 56 (1997): 33-63.

<sup>37</sup> This point dominated the description of workers in Sichuan editions of local histories, *wenshi ziliao*: Sichuansheng zhengxie wenshiziliao weiyuanhuibian 四川省政協文史資料委員會編. 1996. *Sichuan*

boatmen perceived themselves within the society, but not the society as it was (that they surely did not know) but as they saw it, on the basis of categories they created and believed in.

Finally, we would not be able to access the popular culture of boatmen and carriers if it were not for serious scholarly achievements in reading oral cultures. On the one hand, field-work based studies by scholars such as Jan Vansina on East African oral histories and Vibeke Børdahl on Yangzhou storytelling provide us with an indispensable guidance as to how to understand text within the context of performance theory. In short, it allows us to diminish the role of text in relation to internal and external elements of the performance – physical movement, music, rhythm, the performer's voice, audience participation and audience reaction. This point was strongly accentuated by John M. Foley, whose cross-cultural study of oral poems emphasized the necessity of looking at performance as a whole, encompassing the environmental factors through which oral art is being produced, and only through which it gains its meaning.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach has been fundamental for this thesis. Apart from a separate chapter on the ethnomusicological aspects of boatmen's songs, I underline throughout the text that at no time are these songs to be seen outside the social and performative context of river work.

On the other hand, a long tradition of reading and interpreting oral epics indicates to us both the way in which such traditions are to be read, but also the limits and differences between songs and oral epics of more sophisticated content. An enormous body of scholarly work focused on Homeric and Southern Slav epics by Miliam Perry, Albert Lord and their followers, as well as more recent research of the Chinese epic tradition have enabled us to understand the inner construction of oral art.<sup>39</sup> The elaborate composition of oral epics allows their fairly easy memorization, reproduction and readjustment according to needs of

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wenshiziliao jicui 四川文史資料集粹, Shehui minqingbian jita 社會民情編及它. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe.

<sup>38</sup> Foley, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Vibeke Børdahl. "Storytelling, Stock Phrases and Genre Conventions: The Case of 'Wu Song Fights the Tiger'" in Vibeke Børdahl and Margaret B. Wan, 2010. *The Interplay of the Oral and the Written in Chinese Popular Literature*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies: 83-156.

an audience and a performer.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, however, the content of the epic becomes stabilized with its heroes and situations often acquiring symbolic value.

On the contrary, we need to underline that the differences between a song and an oral epic are quite significant. Even though a number of elements pertaining to the 'codification' of certain images and composition of verses can be similar, the form of performance and flexibility of content on the side of the songs was much larger than in the case of epics. While most of the spoken arts were staged in a more or less formalized environment meant or temporarily considered to be appropriate for that form of performance (we can include here anything from theater stage to street corner), popular songs of whatever kind discussed were sung predominantly during work in an environment particularly inimical to organized and premeditated performance.

Two highly important consequences of this difference were, firstly a lack, on the side of work songs, of premeditated repertoire – each one was usually chosen or adjusted on ad-hoc basis according to place, time and conditions of work; and a lack of musical accompaniment, at least in the form that is usually associated with the oral-musical narrative forms. Conversely, Sichuan boatmen's songs were sung together with many other sounds both natural (such as the roaring river) and of human provenance: gongs, drums, gun shots, screams and yells etc. Secondly, and by no means less significant, was the lack of the role of a performer or a storyteller. The professional identity of storytellers and their immense influence on the oral tradition has been well recognized by scholars, who have pointed to the long history of the profession, the transmission of knowledge within various schools, the influence of individual 'manners' and interaction between artists and audiences as constructive elements of the art.<sup>41</sup> None of these elements, at least in a provable form and degree can be traced for the work songs. Engaging with these songs, we thus need to be very cautious so as not to treat them on a similar basis to 'oral arts' or 'oral poems' as

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<sup>40</sup> John Miles Foley. 1988. *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Børdahl, 2003: 65-112. André Lévy. "About the Chinese Storyteller's Change of Name" in Vibeke Børdahl, ed. 1999. *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press: 33-39. Lucie Boratová. "Old Depictions of Chinese Storytellers" in Børdahl, 1999: 45-52.

defined by Foley.<sup>42</sup> Their non-ritual usage, immediate response to changing work conditions, and functionality within the performance of river labor stand as their most fundamental characteristics. On the other hand, the fact the same work songs transmitted contents, which for peasants or artisans were also contained within other genres (such as operas and storytelling), points to the necessity of relying on the methods also devised for these types of art.

As we shall see, the breadth of cultural contact the boatmen experienced was at the same time matched by a strong bond to the locality – the environment in which they lived and worked. From there they derived their language, religious imagery and perception of social relations. These places were river towns of Eastern Sichuan, including the prefectural metropolis of Chongqing. Immersed in local history, culture, and lifestyle boatmen used received images to their own purpose, while local spaces provided important elements of their vision of society. More than the places, however, it was local society, with its expectations, roles, and hierarchies that shaped their worldview. The ramifications of the social order were not only material but also mythical – they included heroes, ghosts and gods, all with their respective stories and regional particularities. Both these spheres interacted in an indivisible manner, and provided the building blocks of the cultural fabric of the Sichuan worker.

## **Sources of Chongqing and Eastern Sichuan History**

To understand the importance of research into Sichuan boatmen's culture and in fact to understand this type of popular culture I had to rely on a wide variety of sources. Our critical evaluation of them should demonstrate the limitations and interrelations between different types of material and inform our further reading of boatmen's culture.

Sichuan occupied a particular place in the structure of knowledge of Chinese and Western intellectuals, journalists or travel writers. It simultaneously held a position of one of the oldest centers of Han culture and of a frontier region, on the borders of civilization. This opposing discursive tension characterized almost all the accounts about the province and

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<sup>42</sup> Foley divided oral poems into four categories: oral performance, voiced text, voices from the past and written oral poems. They related respectively to such types of performance as Tibetan storytelling, American slam poetry, South African praise poetry, and reading of the *Iliad and Odyssey*, Foley, 2002: 39, 1-10.

especially about its Eastern part, which included Chongqing and the Yangzi Gorges. The particular historical development from a marginal region to one of China's most important economic centers in the space of one hundred years only aggravated this problem. Chinese writers constantly moved between describing what was familiar and appreciated and what was alien, skewed and even detestable. In part, Western writers inherited this perspective, yet for them it was much more the exotic and magnificent that called for attention. Nonetheless, Westerners never understood Sichuan as something different from 'China', many of them, perceiving it as an ancient essence of the Middle Kingdom, long gone from the boulevards of Shanghai. It needs to be underlined that compared with many of their coastal counterparts, the Europeans and Americans who ventured to Sichuan were an outstanding group, whether due to their knowledge of China, their professional skills, or their belief in humanism overriding notions of race and otherness.

In writing about such diverse discourses on Sichuan it appears helpful to borrow Bernard S. Cohn's idea of "investigative modalities." Analyzing the development of colonial knowledge Cohn defined it as "a body of information that is needed, that procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, this ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes, and encyclopedias."<sup>43</sup> In our case we can see three such modalities, each internally integrated and yet existing independently and often in parallel to the other. The first was based within the ancient intellectual framework of writing about local history and customs. We can find this in many distinct genres such as county gazetteers, geographical treatises and bamboo branch poems. I will call it for our purpose 'classical modality'. The second sprang up with growth of a new Westernized urban elite and addressed the particular needs of the emergent business, political and educational community. We can find their opinion in many city guides, travelogues, and newspapers. I will call it a 'modernizing modality'. The third modality, which I will name 'foreign', belonged to Western travelers. It was most commonly expressed in travel writing and reminiscences. A number of 'scientific' works also exist, addressed to an educated European and American public, as well as company letters and reports that can inform us about the province.

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<sup>43</sup> Bernard S. Cohn. *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 5.

## ‘Classical Modality’

It is not the place here to outline a whole body of concepts that underlined the writing of local Sichuan history from classical times – such a task certainly deserves a separate study. Instead, I will point to a number of relevant problems connected with such sources of information, namely, the manner in which authors criticized and appreciated local society.

Local historiography in Sichuan, according to Michael J. Farmer, commenced in the third century with the writings of Qiao Zhou (譙周, ca. 200-270 CE). Although the works of Qiao exist only in extracts, we can trace his influence on future historians, whether in form of composition, ideological underpinnings or expressed judgments. His depiction of Sichuan proceeded along three lines: relating places and personalities to the general history of the empire; “locality stories” not related to the general history; and translocation of heroes of different origin to Sichuan. Qiao Zhou’s work informed his intellectual descendant Chang Qu 常璩 (c. 291-c. 361 CE), author of *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志, the most popular and one of the earliest local gazetteers compiled in China, which also treated Sichuan. Both works, being actual foundations of understanding, which related this region to the centers of imperial power and culture, were born of a sense of regional pride as much as political infighting during the post-Han chaos.<sup>44</sup> These early authors gave voice to and framed the tension with which Sichuan was to be viewed – on the one hand as a place of great scholarly achievement concentrated in Chengdu; on the other as a place of various insufficiencies, aberrations and exoticisms. At the same time, they confirmed, without themselves transmitting, a variety of images, cults, heroes, and places, which did not belong to Sichuan. With some awkwardness they established Sichuan as one of the provinces within a cultural milieu that originated in Northern China.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Farmer, J. 2007. *The Talent of Shu: Qiao Zhou and the Intellectual World of Early Medieval Sichuan*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press: 121-143. “The views expressed by Ban Gu [班固 32-92 CE; one of the authors of *Han shu* 漢書] in the “Geographic Treatise” [...] that the bounty of the land [in Sichuan] resulted in the weak character of its inhabitants perhaps best exemplifies the Central Plains view of the Chengdu Plain. And while Ban Gu’s prejudice against the south may have been somewhat extreme, despite over three hundred years of Qin and Han influence in the area, many outsiders were still unconvinced that the region was an equally culture part of the empire.” Ibid: 142.

<sup>45</sup> For an analysis of Chang Qu career and historical writings see: Terry F. Kleeman. *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press: 108-112.



Later authors often referred to the observations and comments of Qiao Zhou and Chang Qu, though investing these observations with different meanings.<sup>46</sup> For example, one of the most common concepts in these descriptions was a presumed “simplicity” or “honesty” *dun/chun* (敦/淳) of Sichuan people as well as their proclivity to (immoral) “luxury” *chi* (侈). The third and fourth century authors understood “simplicity” as marks of acculturation and, at the same time, tried to project a somewhat idyllic picture of the province. The same point, though employed by Qiao Zhou and Chang Qu in discussion of the Chengdu plain (the unchallenged center of Sichuan till the late nineteenth century), was successfully utilized six centuries later by Song dynasty literati. For them, as pointed out by Richard von Glahn, the epithets were accurate descriptions of the Southern and Eastern parts of the province, the then Sinicized and colonized lands of Lu 瀘 and Yu 渝 (Chongqing).<sup>47</sup>

Late imperial authors such as Cao Xuequan 曹學佺 (1574-1646), a scholar and official, author of *Shuzhong guangji* 蜀中廣記 (1643) [The Geography of Sichuan] and Wang Erjian author of the Ba County Gazetteer (1761) were more critical of the social issues in the province.<sup>48</sup> Wang observed the reconstruction of Sichuan after the disaster of the Ming-Qing transition. In the eyes of this classically educated official the abrupt and chaotic process, much faster than its post-Mongol invasion counterpart, brought surprisingly similar fruits. Although local customs were largely seen as benign and naïve, it was the growth of the merchant class that caused barely hidden disgust. Large numbers of immigrants made dialects to mix and made social mores become chaotic. According to Wang, the land was badly cared for and merchants used it as another source of capital bought and sold for profit. People did not study and the number of graduates was shockingly low, especially in

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<sup>46</sup> This was one of the main characteristic of the genre: Endymion Wilkinson. 2000. *Chinese History: A Manual. Revised and Enlarged*. Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press: 154-158.

<sup>47</sup> Von Glahn, 1987: 39-67, 203-220.

<sup>48</sup> For Cao “honesty” could mean on one side no robberies or beliefs and practices fairly outside his range of acceptance, such as reverence of bird spirits and forest ghosts. Cao Xuequan 曹學佺. 1643. *Shuzhong guangji* 蜀中廣記: 57 juan 卷. Fengsu ji di san 風俗記第三: shang xia chuan dong dao shu 上下川東道屬. There is a number of biographies of Cao Xuequan, see: Li Yu'an 李玉安 and Huang Zhengyu 黃正雨. 2003. *Zhongguo cangshujia tongdian* 中國藏書家通典. Xiang'gang: Zhongguo guoji wenhua chubanshe. Online biography: <http://www.phoer.net/people/c/caoxuequan.htm>.

the area of Chongqing.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, merchants in Yangzi ports were obscenely rich and squandered their money on concubines, luxuries and drink. They were repulsive for their miserliness and opulence, these being two sides of the same disease.<sup>50</sup>

By the early twentieth century, “naivety” had become more and more confined to the lower classes and particularly to country people (*xiangren* 鄉人). It was also associated less with some broadly understood character of the people than with ritual behaviors and beliefs classified as superstition (*mixin* 迷信).<sup>51</sup> The conceptualization of social problems within this modality was giving way to another contemporary discursive pattern, linked with belief in a modernization project.

In contrast, there was a concept of aesthetics, which retained much more validity until the twentieth century, and was partially revived from the 1980s. Scholarly appreciation of local beauty was usually organized through linking places of special interest and aesthetic value with legendary heroes (irrespective whether of local or transplanted origin). The origins of the notion of Sichuan beauty seem to be the same as those of opinions about local society. They also showed remarkable persistence, seemingly defying historical change. Yet, these aesthetic visions also had their own history, linked more with intellectuals’ perceptions sometimes turned into artistic *operae*, than with the economic, social and political development of the province. It was a history of appropriation, sophistication, reinterpretation and addition grafted onto existing ideas and motifs.<sup>52</sup>

The system of aesthetic symbols, which had its origins in the writings of Qiao Zhou and Chang Qu, was largely formalized by the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Both Chongqing and the Yangzi Gorges were filled with sights and places to which the literati turned their

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<sup>49</sup> Paul J. Smith states that until the end of Southern Song they never exceeded 5% of all Sichuan *jinshi*, between 1297 and 1754 they oscillated between 10 and 20 %, with the period 1655-1703 with 26%. In the latter half of eighteenth century the number and provincial share of *jinshi* originating from Eastern Sichuan was rising. Number-wise, the most successful *jinshi* candidates were from mid-fifteenth till mid-seventeenth century: 187. Paul J. Smith. “Commerce, Agriculture, and Core Formation in the Upper Yangzi, 2 A.D to 1948,” *Late Imperial China* Vol. 9, No.1 (June 1988): 19. In Ba county (containing Chongqing) the numbers of successful *jinshi* candidates were even smaller – during Song: 7, Ming: 112, Qing: 26. From the beginning of Qing rule till the time Wang Erjian composed his Ba County Gazetteer (1761), there were only 8 *jinshi*. This number confirms Wang’s criticism of the low scholastic achievement in Eastern Sichuan. *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 1079-1083.

<sup>50</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1761, juan 10, fengtuzhi 風土志, xisu 習俗.

<sup>51</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 781-789.

<sup>52</sup> Scholars observed similar processes occurring for various areas of art and belief throughout imperial history.

<sup>53</sup> Farmer: 121-143.

appreciative attention. Gazetteer compliers and travelling officials marveled at these places recounting their histories and writing poems, each with careful reference to the more famous writers of the past, who had engaged in similar activity. It became a widespread activity to jot a few lines of a so-called bamboo branch poem expressing happiness and deeper thoughts or historical reminiscences at the sight of, for example, the White Emperor City (Baidicheng 白帝城).<sup>54</sup> In local histories such places were usually placed among historical sites (*guji* 古跡) or beauty spots (*jing* 景); by the twentieth century many of them were designated as beauty sites of touristic interest.<sup>55</sup> Every guide to Chongqing or travelogue to Sichuan contained a chapter on the Twelve Marvels of Ba (Ba Yu shi er jing) – places traditionally recognized for their historical and aesthetic value and fortified in through poetry and funding of inscriptions. For example, in 1939 Lu Sihong, author of a comprehensive pocket size directory to Chongqing listed places such as: Flooded Cliffs Emerald Water Drops (Hongya dicui 洪崖滴翠), Mighty Moon-shaped Dragon Gate (Longmen haoyue 龍門浩月), Candles Glowing in the Night on the Character-Shaped Water (Zishui xiaodeng 字水宵燈), Night Rain on the Fotu Mountain (Fotu yeyu 佛圖夜雨), etc.<sup>56</sup> These poetic names overlaid real parts of the Chongqing landscape: Hongya Cave by the Jialing River, a huge rock at the bottom of the Yangzi in front of the city, the confluence of two rivers enclosing Chongqing, and a mountain monastery west of the old city walls.

As we can see, the classical perception of Sichuan's beauty was a product of a self-referential exchange among literati. What made a place beautiful, worth writing about, requiring respect was largely coming out of respect for and the need for identification with the great ancients. Designated places included large rock formations quite common to the region. Their value was that of constant appreciation and the rich literary tradition treating them, rather than that of delighting in a spectacular location for itself. By 1939, these places had been overtaken by urban development with all its destructive industrialization – this did not however eliminate them from the universe of elite aesthetics.

<sup>54</sup> Ex. "Eight marvellous sights poems" ("Bajing zhuzhici" 八景竹枝詞) by Zhu Diaozhi 朱鈞直, or poems of Tang Zhifeng 唐之鳳. *Zhuzhici*: 523, 541.

<sup>55</sup> More on this topic, see: Yajun Mo. *Itineraries for a Republic: Tourism and Travel Culture in Modern China*. PhD thesis, University of California Santa Cruz, June 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Lu Sihong 陸思紅. 1939. *Xin Chongqing* 新重慶. Chongqing: Zhonghua shuju: 82-89.

### **‘Modernizing Modality’**

A lot has been written about ‘modernization’ and ‘modernity’ in the context of China. Little effort, however, has been spent in locating modernity as a specific modality – a mode of constructing and comprehending society and space. It is quite apparent, even from cursory reading of late republican published sources, that they were written for a middle class urban public from coastal cities and that this public provided a model for urbanites from the hinterland. The knowledge and power disproportion between these two urban Chinese societies, one self-styled ‘modern’, the other ‘traditional’ was expressed through a discourse of ‘insufficiency’ and ‘backwardness’ which characterized the latter.

Numerous publications, which by the 1930s dominated the discussion on geographical and social differences between various centers in China, took on new subjects and articulated new interests. Their main topic was the city, distinctively cut off from its hinterland and functioning as a separate entity. The city possessed its own culture, economy, politics and populations, whose features were seen on a comparative, teleological scale of achievement in the civilizing mission of contemporary elites. These urban accomplishments extended over issues of infrastructure (roads, water works, electricity etc.), entertainment (theaters, cinemas, and commercial centers), business establishments (such as banks, steamer companies, telecommunications), and success in realizing nationally demarcated goals like fighting against opium addiction. Such a discursive approach, outwardly neutral, was often intolerant of regional differences and contaminated with a firm prejudice against provincial China, pictured as the antithesis to modernity. A few examples, pertaining to views on the Sichuan lower classes should suffice to demonstrate this view.

Discussion on the region and its lower classes was largely subservient to the ideological discourse of nationalism, which in its Chinese strain combined a critique of the social order with a fascination for technological modernity and a modern hygienic ethos. If a simple definition can be given to this view, it should be seen as a mixture of mercy and disgust. The poor, whether old or young, working with their hands or begging were classified as suffering bitterness: *ku* 苦. From this word the notoriously imprecise and generalized name of the poor man’s main profession derived: the coolie (*kuli* 苦力) –one who works with physical strength suffering bitterness of life. By the late 1930s, coolies were seen as particularly

socially deficient, through their lack of organization or education on one side, and shameful entertainments on the other.<sup>57</sup> Being sorry for the poor sometimes gave rise to efforts to raise sympathy – usually obtained through heart-breaking stories. In that vein the main Chongqing daily, *Xinshubao* 新蜀報, a mildly leftist newspaper owned by Chongqing warlord Liu Xiang, ran a number of stories on poor press-ganged workers or the destitute elderly.<sup>58</sup> As they were meant to raise middle class awareness by arousing sympathy, the same paper also included calls to rich citizens to help alleviate this tragic working class poverty.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, sympathy was in short supply compared with the corrective/nation-building discourse. The common man appeared usually as a problem, as was clearly stated in the discussion on society opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1936 in the pages of *Xinshubao*. The question of what society was, was quickly subverted to one asking why social problems existed (*shehui wenti* 社會問題). These consisted of unemployment, begging, prostitution, robbery and murder – and they all required correction in behavior and education in way of life.<sup>60</sup>

The topic of culture and entertainment was also cast in the shape of regional disparities, underlining the superiority of China's centers and the offensive inferiority of its hinterland. Opera provides a good example. Already in an early article in 1930, the journalist, Nan Guosheng 南郭生, perceived the fledgling local Sichuan opera industry as aesthetically repulsive and needing rapid reform. On the other hand, he lauded performances of Beijing opera taking place in Chongqing, though underlining that the quality was only achieved due to visits of famous actors from other cities. The only laudable form of public art he encountered were shows of Beijing opera, which though rare, at least were not offensive.<sup>61</sup> More polite opinions tended to consider local opera "baffling" or "lacking reason"

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<sup>57</sup> Tie Xue 鐵血, "Chongqingde kuli zuzhi" 重慶的苦力組織, *Xinshubao*, 1937/3/18: 4.

<sup>58</sup> Yu Cai 雨財, "Lafu" 拉夫 *Xinshubao*, 9/11/1932: 8/1. Qi Xiang 淒象 "Lafu" *ibid*: 8/1. Qiao Feng 曉峯, "Shuo buchude ku" 說不出的苦, *Xinshubao* 7/4/1933: 8/2. Wang Miaoyu 王廟玉, "Qigai wenti" 乞丐問題, *Xinshubao*, 25/1/1937: 4.

<sup>59</sup> Shao Yong 少庸, "Qiongren yu furen" 窮人與富人, *Xinshubao*, 18/3/1937: 4.

<sup>60</sup> Qian Di 謙弟, "Zhongguo shehui yige yanjiufa" 中國社會一個研究法, *Xinshubao*, 9/2/1936: 4.

<sup>61</sup> Nan Guosheng 南郭生. "Chongqing juchang zhi gaikuang" 重慶劇場之概況, *Xiju yuekan* 戲劇月刊, 1/3/1930: 1-3.

(*momingqimiao* 莫名其妙).<sup>62</sup> Obviously these were not the only impressions gathered about local culture. Nevertheless, their power was sufficiently strong to produce an audience among middle classes that dissociated themselves from the local popular culture. Bewilderment at, correction and education of these were the answers to local character, to insufficiency of modernity and to working class persistence in backwardness. If the publishers in the 1930s added anything to these ideas, it was disgust with the everyday appearance and behavior of the workers. Thus such common ‘vulgarity’ like smoking opium, spitting and swearing drew on themselves the fire of intellectual critique.<sup>63</sup>

As we can see, ‘modernizing modality’ introduced new problematic and addressed different social and cultural issues than ‘classical’ writing on Sichuan. At the same time, it was equally, if not even more, structured around ideological premises, being entangled in the set of stereotypes of its own creation. It is quite apparent that sources coming from this intellectual framework, however informative and useful, cannot be taken at face value. They need to be assessed from the perspective of the beliefs held by their authors, who more often than not devoted their lives to portraying social problems and reforming China – a political undertaking by definition.

### ‘Foreign Modality’

Sichuan did not attract much attention from foreigners before the Second World War, which thrust previously obscure Chongqing, the new capital, onto the front pages of the world’s newspapers. At that period, Western writers were rather unsympathetic to a troubled and overcrowded city, with its impoverished and overstrained infrastructure. There is no space here to try to summarize all the diverse voices. Rather, I would like to focus on four remarkable individuals whose observations are indispensable in addressing the topic of Sichuan popular culture: Archibald John Little, Isabella Lucy Bird, Fritz Weiss (Max Friedrich Weiss), and David Crockett Graham.

The few foreigners who traveled and lived in Sichuan and Chongqing never formed a community comparable to that of Shanghai and Tianjin. They remained dispersed and

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<sup>62</sup> Shu Xincheng 舒心城. 1939. *Shuyou xinying* 蜀游心影. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju: 40.

<sup>63</sup> Jin Mancheng 金滿成, “Guanyu maren” 關於罵人, *Xinshubao* 20/5/1932: 8, 21/5/1932: 8, 22/5/1932: 8. Mao Yibo 毛一波, “Tutan shehuixue” 吐痰社會學, *Xinshubao* 25/1/1936: 4/1. Huang Jiujia 黃九加. 1935. *Zhongguo shida mingcheng youji* 中國十大名城游記. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju: 105.

necessarily much more integrated with the local Chinese population. Many of the early travelers were very well acquainted with Chinese culture, knew the language, and created a dense network of local contacts and dependencies. Slowly by the 1930s, Chongqing and Chengdu were becoming better known locations, attracting individuals who did not have any previous experience of China.

Archibald John Little (1838-1908) was certainly the most original and fascinating of the late nineteenth century travelers to Sichuan. Even though he was a prolific and widely published writer, not much is known about his life.<sup>64</sup> Little spent most of his adult life in China operating businesses, traveling, exploring, writing and translating. He was fascinated by the geography, geology, history and traditions of China and, as can be concluded from his writings, he found a realization of his dreams of China in travels to Sichuan. He must have differed considerably from his contemporaries; when writing about China he generally abstained from sharp criticism of Chinese traditions and forms of government, though he recognized that the empire was not exploiting its opportunities for achieving prosperity. In the introduction to *Through the Yangzi Gorges* he pointed out: "The venality of the officials notwithstanding, the people are, if not well governed, certainly not misgoverned; riches are fairly distributed, and the contrast of grinding poverty with arrogant wealth, the rule in Europe, is the exception here."<sup>65</sup> Throughout his life, it seems, he detested missionaries, blaming them for most of the evil that prevailed in relations between Westerners and Chinese. In a straightforward way, he attacked them for triggering religious pogroms and the Boxer uprising.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, he held a deep respect for his contractors and friends, and his business partners in Chongqing who helped him organize his first trip to Sichuan. Neither was he a strong proponent of any vision of racial or cultural superiority on the part of Europeans – in an essay comparing Beijing to London, it was the former that received more admiration.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, his deference to China did not extend to other Asian nations, which, apart from Japan, he viewed as racially and culturally inferior.<sup>68</sup> The writings of Archibald Little have to be seen as quite exceptional compared to other authors – none of

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<sup>64</sup> <http://cambridgelibrarycollection.wordpress.com/2011/10/31/archibald-and-alicia/>.

<sup>65</sup> Archibald John Little. 2010 (1888). *Through the Yang-tse Gorges: Or Trade and Travel in Western China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-2. This work is going to be referred further as 'Little.'

<sup>66</sup> Archibald John Little, Alicia Little (ed.). 2010 (1910). *Gleanings from Fifty Years in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 289-307 (essay: "Missionaries In China").

<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 74-91 (essay: "Two Cities: London and Peking").

<sup>68</sup> Archibald John Little. 2010 (1905). *The Far East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

them were as equally immersed in Chinese life, nor possessed such a unique combination of broad interest, wide network of friends and the audacity to venture out and gather first-hand experience.

Another prominent nineteenth century writer, who explored Sichuan, was Isabella Lucy Bird (1821-1904; married name Bishop). Bird, the first woman admitted to the Royal Geographic Society (1892), was most probably one of the greatest travelers of her times. Her ventures spanned almost the whole world, and of each of her journeys, whether to the American West, Hawai'i, Australia, India, Persia, Korea etc. she wrote a rather wordy account. She did not learn the languages of visited countries, and relied on a network of friends and associates – in the case of her travels to Western China, she participated in missionary activity directed toward the people of Sichuan and Tibet. Nevertheless, Bird was not a 'safe traveler' – she was always ready to go off track, never protested about discomforts, and occasionally put herself in danger. Her attitude toward the Chinese was fairly deferential, but also confused and inconsistent:

[But] if the extraordinary energy, adaptability, and industry of the Chinese may be regarded from one point of view as the "Yellow Peril," surely looked at from another they constitute the Yellow Hope, and it may be possible that an empire genuinely Christianised, but not denationalised, may yet be the dominant power in Eastern Asia. The Chinese are ignorant and superstitious beyond belief, but on the whole, with all their faults, I doubt whether any other Oriental race runs so straight.<sup>69</sup>

Bird's understanding of the problems of her time was certainly limited, and her devotion to her missionary background as well as to her associates in China was strong, yet she did not fail to be critical of the more blunt racist discourse of her time. Moreover, she was a keen observer with rare devotion to detail and more understanding than her limited linguistic skills might have allowed. Her unmatched descriptions, when corroborated with other sources show remarkable accuracy.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Isabella Bird. 1899 (2010). *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond: An Account of Journeys in China, Chiefly in the Province of Sze Chuan and Among the Man-tze of the Somo Territory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 13.

<sup>70</sup> See: H. C. G. Mathew and Brian Harrison, eds. 2004. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography in Association with The British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*. Volume 5, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 870-872.



In comparison, later accounts pale in order of originality as second-hand knowledge of China (exclusively non-Chinese) became rather widespread. Nonetheless, two outstanding personalities provide a notable exception. Max Friedrich Weiss (1877-1955, alternatively Weiß, from 1951, Wyss) was a Swiss born translator from Chinese into German and later General Consul in Chengdu. He lived in China from 1899 till 1917, with a short break in 1910-1911, where he met his wife, Hedwig Margarete Sonnenburg (1889-1975), with whom he traveled and explored the rivers and frontiers of Sichuan. Weiss produced exceptional sources by any comparison: the first extant recordings of boatmen as well as Lolo (Yi 彝) folk songs as well as an extensive collection of pictures. The songs were recorded on the Edison wax cylinder device – a cheap, handy and easy to transport device. The wax cylinders, however, were quite difficult to procure in Western China, and they were a fragile carrier, easy to destroy mechanically with heat, water, dirt, or simply bad storage. Weiss's recordings conducted in the Yangzi Gorges during his 1911 trip to Chongqing, were in fact lost by the shipping company and he had to remake them on the docks of Chongqing. The boat songs to which we have access today are thus staged, recorded outside the work environment and, as can be inferred, geared to the taste and enjoyment of the singers. They are a selection made to be characteristic, containing a few rowing songs, and at least two traditional songs used during celebrations, such as the Dragon Boat Festival.<sup>71</sup> The pictures made by Weiss were recently analyzed by Tamara Wyss and do not require detailed treatment here.<sup>72</sup>

Another remarkable writer, and in fact one of the few genuine scholars of Sichuan culture was David Crockett Graham (1884-1961). Being a deeply religious, Methodist missionary in Sichuan, he was involved in issues of education and social work. At the same time Graham pursued a scholastic career, involving himself among other subjects in archeology, anthropology, ethnography, and religious studies. His study entitled *Folk Religion in Southwest China* is the most detailed and well-informed English language book dealing with the complexities of religious life in the province written on the basis of data collected in pre-1949 times. Graham was modest in presentation of his findings, tending to underline the

<sup>71</sup> Susanne Ziegler. 2006. *Die Wachsylinder des Berliner Phonogramm-Archivs*. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 386-387.

<sup>72</sup> Tamara Wyss. "Searching for the 'Lolos': Tracking Fritz and Hedwig Weiss's trip to the Liangshan Region in 1913" in Denise M. Glover, Stevan Harrell, Charles F. McKhann, Margaret B. Swain, eds. 2011. *Explorers and Scientists in China's Borderlands, 1880-1950*. Seattle: University of Washington Press: 91-115.

limitations of his knowledge and the personal observations that drove him to write this work. At the same time, he succeeded in depicting many rituals prevalent in the province and dealt with the complexity of various practices, without intruding his own religious convictions. Graham was faced with a sharp decline in religious practice, and he felt a need to address the reasons for such an important change. Whatever can be said about the inaccuracies in his work, it is an excellent document of the practices at the center of Chinese intellectuals' interest, and the divergent perspective of Graham allows us to see these issues from a different angle.<sup>73</sup>

### **Urbanity and Modernization – Historiography on Chinese Cities**

Finally, as will be demonstrated, a majority of Sichuan boatmen were urban or rather sub-urban dwellers. They resided on boats turned into houses and makeshift river bank towns that lined the city walls of almost every town in Eastern Sichuan and most prominently, Chongqing. Their noisy makeshift camps fascinated and repulsed every traveler to the province.<sup>74</sup> The virtual boat-towns clogged river channels, but at the same time provided services previously difficult to obtain: fairly easy ferrying and transportation of goods for any distance. The urban character of boatmen, however, has to be seen as conditional –they spent most of the time working on the rivers, confined to their own community. Many trackers, on the other hand, were just seasonal workers who put up their camps in the gorges –fairly proto-urban proletarian settlements not recognized or ordered by any authority. In both cases, we have to see boatmen not as members of the rural society, but rather as people who crossed the boundaries of their small communities or who were already permanent members of the river laboring class.

Boatmen helped to create and fueled the commercial and urban revolution of late Qing China. This process, however, was not recognized in Western scholarship as being urban or even belonging to the order of “modern” China. Instead, it was rather viewed as its reversal or even an aberration. In Chinese scholarship, on the other hand, not much attention was paid to this kind of fluid and lower class urbanization. Scarcity of sources and a strong

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<sup>73</sup> Jeff Kyong-McClain and Geng Jing. “David Crockett Graham in Chinese Intellectual History” in *Explorers and Scientists in China’s Borderlands, 1880-1950*: 211-237.

<sup>74</sup> For detailed descriptions see: Chapter 1.

predilection to emphasize the “modern” sectors of the economy (Western-style banks, industries, steamship companies) pushed the mass of boat people either into discursive oblivion, or into the realm of folklore and ethnography.<sup>75</sup> In this light it is necessary to discuss here briefly the problem of “modernization” in the context of urban studies in China and the West. I would like to mention here some of the methodological shortcomings, which have caused multiple misinterpretations of the process of Chinese urban change and encouraged selective and often uncritical reading of sources, springing from a particular political outlook.

It has been broadly claimed that late-Qing and Republican urbanization was connected with “modernity” and “nationalism.” Both concepts were seen as sufficient to explain the Chinese city and the process of its change. In his essay “Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City” Joseph W. Esherick outlined major interpretative lines for studying cities. It is worth quoting at some length:

By and large, the struggle for (and between) nation and modernity has taken place in cities. In any society, the city is the locus of the modern. In the discourse of the early twentieth century the “modern” city was always set against the “backward” countryside. If a nation was to modernize, the cities had to take the lead. In China in this period [1900-1950], with a vast countryside and a weak central government, the city also proved a manageable social and political unit for significant modernizing efforts.<sup>76</sup>

He defined “modernity” and “modernization” (without distinguishing between the concepts) in materialistic terms such as the “schools, press, associations, and civil and military state organs most engaged in defining, promoting, and protecting the nation.”<sup>77</sup> The definition also included other material traces of urban renovation undertaken from the mid-nineteenth century around the world, such as the broadening of streets, construction of water works or

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<sup>75</sup> Interestingly Sichuan studies were not unique in this approach. Early on the “invisibility” of boat communities in Pearl River Delta was recognized by Eugene Anderson, see: Eugene N. Anderson. 1972. *Essays on South China's Boat People*. Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service: 1-9.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph E. Esherick. “Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City” in Joseph W. Esherick, ed. 2000. *Remaking the Chinese City. Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1.

<sup>77</sup> Esherick: op. cit.: 1.

coffeehouses, supplemented by “rumor and gossip, fashion and fantasies.”<sup>78</sup> The rendition of Chinese early twentieth century urbanization in such terms was connected with the description of this process in terms of achievements and insufficiencies set in a rather teleological scheme whose final end was the “modern”, so often simply equated with Shanghai.<sup>79</sup>

An example of such writing can be seen in the article of Lee McIsaac on Chongqing.<sup>80</sup> McIsaac, confusing discourse on “modernity” and “downriver people” (emigrants from Lower Yangzi to wartime Chongqing according to McIsaac) with an analysis of the social and economic situation of the city she studied, presented a binary division of Chinese society and urban centers set on a straight trajectory leading from China’s innate poverty to Shanghai’s prosperity. She claimed that: “[the] hierarchical relationship between these components of the Chinese nation – and the political groups they represented – was neatly reflected in the spatial reconstruction of Chongqing that took place during the war.”<sup>81</sup> The “neat” connection between the shape of urban space, the situation of various social classes and the general condition of the Chinese nation finds no convincing support in the source material quoted by McIsaac.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Esherick: 2. Similar processes, but without the underlying methodological conditioning was used in studies about multiple other world regions; this issue received enormous scholarly attention. For some examples, see: Peter J. Carroll. 2006. *Between Heaven and Modernity: Reconstructing Suzhou, 1895-1937*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Zeynep Çelik. 2008. *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Alexander R. Cuthbert. 2006. *The Form of Cities: Political Economy and Urban Design*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Richard Dennis. 2008. *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. David Frisby. 2001. *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations*. Malden, MA: Polity Press. Percy Johnson-Marshall. 2010. *Rebuilding Cities from Medieval to Modern Times*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: AldineTransaction. Friedrich Lenger. 2012. *European Cities in the Modern Era, 1850-1914*. Translated by Joel Golb. Leiden, Boston: Brill. Iain Boyd Whyte, ed. 2003. *Modernism and the Spirit of the City*. London, New York: Routledge.

<sup>79</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee. 1999. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Leo Ou-fan Lee. “The Cultural Construction of Modernity in Urban Shanghai: Some Preliminary Explorations” in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed. 2000. *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 31-61. Leo Ou-fan Lee connected and explained “modernity” as the introduction of new forms of printing, the changing image of women, and the presence of the clock as a symbol of modern time. It was Shanghai market that was “modern”.

<sup>80</sup> Lee McIsaac. “The City as Nation: Creating a Wartime Capital in Chongqing” in *Remaking the Chinese City. Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*: 174-191.

<sup>81</sup> McIsaac: 191.

<sup>82</sup> McIsaac’s argument is based largely on reading one source: memoir of Wu Jisheng 吳濟生. 1939 (1978) *Xindu jianwen lu* 新都見聞錄.

Many other studies, both Chinese and Western (mostly American), though often much better documented, follow a similar premise. This becomes clear when we look at works on regional urbanization such as Zhou Yong's, *Chongqing tongshi* and Wei Yingtao's *Jindai Chongqing chengshi shi*.<sup>83</sup> The structure of both books indicates the extensive importance of modern (nineteenth and twentieth century) history, with the imperial past treated as subsidiary factors and mere antecedents to the processes that took place during the Republic. The outright representation of the city's past as consecutive achievements in improving urban infrastructure and developing a capitalist economy (evidenced through growing population and volume of trade). Focus on these elements and the teleological arrangement of described history all express belief in a modernization discourse very much characteristic of Chinese urban studies from the 1980s on.<sup>84</sup>

The issue is not with any particular reading of Chongqing's past, as much as with the presentation of twentieth century urban processes through the lens of "modernization" and "nation" as specified by Esherick *et al.* Firstly the relationship between nationalism and city is tenuous as cities were not the only loci of nationalist activities; nationalism, as any other political movement in China, was by no means embedded in the city, but tended to find its material expression (monuments, mass rallies) there.<sup>85</sup> Nationalist movements applied to social groups and were produced by intellectuals and political parties, after 1927 dominated largely by the Guomindang, whose activities often concentrated on cities. Nevertheless, urban identity was as proven by Bryna Goodman, Stephen A. Smith and Joshua Howard entangled with various other allegiances and hierarchies: native-place, local, secret society etc.<sup>86</sup> Cities therefore provided a ground for nationalist politics, but were not inherently linked with nationalism, nor can nationalism be considered a product of the city *per se*. As demonstrated by Virgil Ho, even in the motherland of Chinese Nationalist Party, Guangzhou

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<sup>83</sup> Zhou Yong 周勇. 2002. *Chongqing tongshi* 重慶通史. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe. Wei Yingtao, 1991.

<sup>84</sup> Liu Haiyuan and Kristin Stapleton. "Chinese Urban History: State of the Field," *China Information*, Vol 20, No. 3 (2006): 391-427.

<sup>85</sup> Henrietta Harrison. 2000. *The Making of Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>86</sup> Bryna Goodman. 1995. *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities, 1853-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Joshua H. Howard. 2004. *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenal, 1937-1953*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Stephen A. Smith. 2002. *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

廣州, nationalist ideology did not dominate urban popular culture being, in fact, rather an insignificant element.<sup>87</sup>

Secondly, though it is proven that cities were the main ground for modernizing projects as understood at the time of their realization, Esherick's definition of "modern" and "modernization" also pose multiple problems. Additionally, similarly to McIsaac, his link between the city and the "modern" confuses discourse with historical change. In short, it seems that new urban construction seen simply as a means of identity creation is an over-interpretation, since it overlooks direct social, economic, and technological reasons for improving or adopting novel infrastructures – each of which reflected and was motivated by the factional agency of various social and political groups contending for power in the urban environment.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, many of the processes considered "modern," especially enforcing the state's position both symbolically and administratively, were by no means unique to the twentieth century and can be found for any state at any moment of history.<sup>89</sup> What actually hides behind Esherick's "modernity" is a realization of striking and politicized urban reconstruction, pronounced (presented?) and explained through a discourse of "modernity" and "nation-building" but not as a process of achieving "modernity", as a teleological movement from one stage of social development to another, higher level. This narrow and mistaken perspective obliterated and misinterpreted a variety of changes, which republican China was undergoing. It also artificially isolated cities as analytical units, overlooking complex relations between urban politics and changes in the hinterland.<sup>90</sup> Most of all this approach reflects engagement only with one social class of that period, the urban middle class; a social group active in expressing their opinions through modern media (newspapers, magazines, guides etc.) and sufficiently politicized to voice their views. Lack of a critical approach to sources lay

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<sup>87</sup> Virgil K. Y. Ho. 2005. *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>88</sup> Such as warlords, business networks and chambers of commerce, bankers, gangs and secret societies, religious institutions, Western missionaries and businessmen, urban elite cliques, political parties etc. all exploiting modernity discourse to their own aims.

<sup>89</sup> For a classical study in this area, see: Paul Zanker. 1988. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>90</sup> Meaning the reconstruction of countryside and creation of power and resource base in order to control cities, see: David Faure and Tao Tao Liu, eds. 2002. *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*. Houndmills: Palgrave in assoc. with St Anthony's College, Oxford: 1-16.

behind styling Chinese urbanism as a uniformly modern project of Westernization or 'Shanghaiazation' not as a genuine reflection of multiple changes that were occurring in this historical period.

It is in the light of this historiographical tradition that the research proposed here achieves its importance. Focusing on a largely overlooked stratum of Chinese society, such as the non-industrial workers of provincial China, we can see the process of late-Qing and Republican urbanization from a different angle. We can see that rigid divisions between the categories of urban and rural, traditional and modern are difficult to sustain, except by disregarding the spheres of culture and social life that do not fit the model. Conversely, putting our efforts into reading the popular culture of groups such as Sichuan boatmen, it becomes clear that the urbanization process took place in a complex network of cities across regions and was instrumental in the appearance of a working class culture not related to Westernization or modernization, which has so often attracted scholars' attention.

This claim, therefore, needs to be restated. The popular culture of non-industrial workers with its eclectic restatement of local and broader Chinese tradition was a form of "modernity" and a "modern" product of changing late- and post-Qing times. It is not the main purpose of this thesis to discuss how "modern" boatmen's culture was. The main point is to prove the existence of alternatives in discourse and experience that characterized this dramatic age. These alternatives, parallels, forms of resistance and negotiation in the cultural sphere were significant responses to the political, economic and social change of the time. They produced diverse sub-cultures within Chinese society, undermining the nation-building process for successive republican governments, simultaneously participating in the reapplication of inherited culture in changing conditions. The "modernity" of provincial China was thus a period of carving out a novel social and cultural order from the dilapidated Qing structure, a frantic time of reshaping oneself within the means available and with the limitations in understanding conditioned by the position of each social class.<sup>91</sup> The means available to boatmen, as that of many other working class groups were most often confined to the highly parochial Confucianism and local religiosity, as well as to the scope of

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<sup>91</sup> I agree here with the point made by David Faure and Tao Tao Liu who stated about urban elites: "The new elite were preaching to the converted in the cities and their teaching cast the dwellers in the rural areas – which they had been not so long ago – as the villains of the piece in their perceived backwardness as measured in the new-found world abroad." Ibid: 12.

knowledge they could obtain through their work and travel. It was also affected by the urban environments in which they congregated, where they ventured and obtained work, and in that manner it enriched their previous worldview, derived almost entirely from the rural world. Their contacts in the urban milieu, however, were largely confined to the same social class, which did not participate in the construction of a “new” republican Chinese nation. If then we are to argue about “modernity” in Sichuan, it was surely tied in the paradox of being productive to a new working classes and capitalist economy; at the same time it remained confined to what was often deemed “not-modern” if not “anti-modern”. It is this alternative track of Chinese culture history that occupies the pages of this thesis.

## **Thesis Overview**

The thesis consists of three parts. Part 1: The background is divided into three chapters, each providing a separate perspective on the history of Sichuan workers and their traditions. Chapter 1 discusses the social and economic conditions of boatmen’s work and life in the context of regional history. Chapter 2 shows the development of folklore and ethnographic studies, thus contextualizing the collections of songs and stories that form the basis of this project. Here, I discuss major debates on and definitions of the genre of our key interest – Sichuan work songs. Chapter 3 is a musicological analysis of the boatmen’s work songs and the role songs (as an auditory and communal activity) held in these groups’ work and life.

Part 2: Social Spaces, Work and Self-Perception concentrates the way boatmen of Eastern Sichuan perceived and interacted with the physical and social world they lived and worked in. Chapter 4 talks about the way cities and province were memorized, imagined and constructed through voicing lower class claims to their own place in the society and to their own aesthetics. Focusing on images of work Chapter 5 shows how boatmen through bemoaning the exploitation they suffered and lauding the strength of their brotherhood resisted their low social position. Finally, Chapter 6 comes to grips with the understating of death held by Sichuan boatmen and carriers. It questions why these groups so often spoke of death and what this fear of death says about their self-perception within society.



# PART ONE: THE BACKGROUND



# CHAPTER 1: SOCIAL ORIGINS OF SONGS: EASTERN SICHUAN WORKING CLASS, 1880s-1930s

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Sichuan boatmen formed only a part of the laboring classes in Eastern Sichuan and as to total numbers, though they are difficult to establish, were certainly not the largest grouping. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, boatmen were central to the economic and social changes that took place in this part of the province, if not in all the South West of China. The growth in their numbers, sophistication of their techniques, and the frequency and scope of their service clearly reflected increased economic activity and penetration of the market into previously rather isolated and marginal regions.

The boatmen of Eastern Sichuan, at least till the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) were often seen as simply a “people without history.” The very limited interest in late-Qing and Republican times in studying and recording local culture, or local folklore, can be explained by the diverse needs of the literate elites, and government administration of the society. In simple terms, their focus on the settled, taxable and organized parts of the society precluded most efforts to take account of the growing mass of the geographically dynamic working class.<sup>92</sup> In effect, we encounter a large body of sources, which with huge accuracy depicted the disjointed units of imperial and republican administration (esp. counties) without much interest in the population that linked them in a workable economic and social system. Such scattered information forces us to reconstruct an image of the working class, based on a variety of very different sources, which include county gazetteers, social surveys published in Republican-period journals, novels, elite leisure bamboo branch poetry (*zhuzhici*), city guides, and Western travelers’ reports. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially from the time Chongqing became an Open Port (*kaibu* 開埠, 1891), Upper Yangzi trade fell under the

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<sup>92</sup> Term created by Eric R. Wolf. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press. The idea of “people without history” was applied by James C. Scott to describe minority areas of the Southwest China (Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi and parts of Sichuan) as well as for the interior of whole Southeast Asia. Considering the extremely limited interference of the imperial and republican governments in the lives of the Sichuan working class river people, I find this analogy compelling. James C. Scott. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

authority of the Chinese Maritime Customs whose local headquarters was busy gathering data and producing yearly reports.<sup>93</sup> As a result, we need not only rely on quantitative data for local trade and boat traffic, but also on descriptive accounts detailing conditions and activities on the stretch of the Yangzi of our interest. Taking all due precautions when approaching these often very partial statistics, we can see through them the growing commercial activity of the Yangzi port-cities, with their diversifying forms of organization and technological change over time. Above all, the documents of the Chongqing Maritime Customs have provided the basis for recent Chinese scholarship – with few changes of opinion, they have remained the mainstream picture of Chongqing and Upper Yangzi society throughout the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup>

## **Social and Economic Basis of the Eastern Sichuan: An Overview**

### **Repopulation of Sichuan**

The river land of Eastern Sichuan, part of the region named by Skinner the Upper Yangzi starkly differed both in natural and human geography from the central parts of the Sichuan plateau.<sup>95</sup> Due to its geomorphologic structure, which consists mainly of mountainous and hilly terrain cut by deep and broad river valleys, Eastern Sichuan till the nineteenth century remained a relatively under-populated borderland. These regional characteristics were additionally augmented by the formidable natural obstacle of the Yangzi Gorges, which divided the populations of Eastern Sichuan from the more prosperous and populous regions of today's central provinces of Hubei and Hunan. Although settled since ancient times, Eastern Sichuan was a marginal and frontier land to the central lands of Sichuan, concentrated on Chengdu 成都.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Full name: Chinese Maritime Customs Service (Zhongguo haiguan zongshuiwusi 中國海關總稅務司); operated from 1854 till 1949. Before 1912 it was called Imperial Maritime Customs Service. Donna Brunero. 2006. *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*. London, New York: Routledge.

<sup>94</sup> Researched and reproduced by such prominent scholars of local history as Wei Yingtao, Zhou Yong and Wang Di. For respective essays see: Wei Yingtao 隗瀛濤, ed. 1989. *Chongqing chengshi yanjiu* 重慶城市研究. Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe.

<sup>95</sup> Skinner's division of China into economic macro regions: G. William Skinner. "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China" in G. William Skinner, ed. 1977. *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 211-249. G. William Skinner. "Cities and the Hierarchy of Local Systems" in G. William Skinner, ed. 1977. *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 275-351.

<sup>96</sup> So called Ba Kingdom 巴國, – 316 BCE Zhou Yong, 2002, Vol. 1 (*Gudaishi* 古代史):50-58.

It has become accepted opinion in recent Chinese urban and regional scholarship, that the economic and social situation of the Eastern Sichuan started to change after the twelfth century division of China (Nan Song 南宋, 1127-1279). Writers such as Zhou Yong claims that the consequent rerouting of trade from the land-based Chengdu-Xi'an 西安 road to the river route based on the Yangzi caused an awakening and rapid blooming of the regional urban economies.<sup>97</sup> In light of the settlement data gathered by Paul J. Smith, such an opinion seems to be exaggerated, since it over-emphasizes the influence of the Song court on Sichuan's economy. Smith demonstrated that the growth of population and economic activity in Eastern Sichuan declined in the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> Only by the early twentieth century can we speak of relative parity between the central Sichuan plateau and Eastern Sichuan.

There were several historical demographic changes, especially during the tragic decades of warfare and displacement of the Mongol conquest (1230s-1260s) and Ming-Qing transition (1640s-1680s), which defined the development of the region. It is accepted that under the Southern Song rule Chongqing and surrounding towns served only defensive and administrative functions constituting a fortified frontier of a besieged empire.<sup>99</sup> Large scale functional change of the region commenced only with the repopulation policies during the Kangxi 康熙 reign (1661-1722). Sichuan, depleted by warfare, was considered the land of opportunity whose resettlement could alleviate pressure on land in the central provinces. Tax-exempted land handouts, long-term fiscal privileges and minimal presence of government administration made the province extremely attractive to all those who were adventurous, impoverished and in conflict with the law.<sup>100</sup>

The resettlement produced a very culturally mixed population. We do not know exactly to what extent the Sichuan population was obliterated during the seventeenth century, but one clear piece of evidence is the disappearance of most of the people from the imperial tax

<sup>97</sup> Ibid: 202-209.

<sup>98</sup> P. J. Smith: 1-78. Von Glahn, 1987.

<sup>99</sup> The word often used for Chongqing of that period is *chengbao* 城堡 – castle-city.

<sup>100</sup> Kangxi 康熙 edict on resettlement, repeated by Yongzheng 雍正 emperor: Wang Di 王笛. "Qingdai Chongqing renkou yu shehui zuzhi" 清代重慶人口與社會組織, in Wei Yingtao, ed. 1989. *Chongqing chengshi yanjiu*. Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe: 310-378.

registers. Wang Di has demonstrated that the rebuilding of the population was predominantly based on migrants. They and their descendants, by the beginning of the nineteenth century were estimated to constitute 85% of the total Sichuan population.<sup>101</sup> For this reason, Wang Di claimed that the sub-ethnic origins of most Sichuan people determined identities, behavior, and modes of governance (understood as management of work and relations to the state) in Chongqing and across the region. Thus, the urban centers did not form a uniform social entity, but rather a number of bodies residing under imperial overlordship, which bound them through taxation and the examination system into one.<sup>102</sup> By the late Qing and during the Republic, the role of co-provincial associations and power of co-provincial sentiments seem to have changed.

Division according to native place in Sichuan went through a number of stages, and its relevance, viewed from the perspective of local people, has to be re-evaluated. The process of resettlement initiated in the last decade of the seventeenth century produced a number of migration waves originating from Huguang, Jiangsu, and in smaller degree Shaanxi and Guangdong. The ritual demand of preserving a link with one's native soil, especially after death, gave rise to the establishment of co-provincial halls (*huiguan* 會館). Although shipment of coffins continued throughout Sichuan at least till the early years of the twentieth century, we should not exaggerate its importance in defining local identity.<sup>103</sup> *Huiguan* in this province functioned predominantly as trade associations – they eased contacts between local and visiting merchants, organized trade practices inside the cities and represented business interests in contacts with local government. The primary method of maintaining cohesion among the disparate interests of various merchant communities was by venerating the cults of gods most current for a particular province outside Sichuan.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, the link between the supra-provincial representations of native place projected by *huiguan* and the ethnicity of Qing and Republican Sichuan lower class people was weak. Lan Yong and Huang Quansheng have demonstrated that the diversity of the

<sup>101</sup> During Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1796-1820), Wang Di, 2002: 66.

<sup>102</sup> Wang Di, 1989: 310-378.

<sup>103</sup> For confirmation of this practice in Chengdu: Wang Di. 2003. *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics in Chengdu, 1870-1930*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

<sup>104</sup> Gou Deyi 苟德儀. 2011. *Chuandong daotai yu difang zhengzhi* 川東道臺與地方政治. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 115-126. Gou leaves no doubt that all such organizations were forms of merchant networking and incorporation, as defined by Faure: op. cit.: 31-44.

province's population was not as big as previously assumed. Even so, in the nineteenth century an alternative name for Sichuan person (Sichuanren 四川人) was half-Chu (ban Chu 半楚) meaning half from Huguang 湖廣 (today's Hubei 湖北 and Hunan 湖南), the main provinces of migrants' origin.<sup>105</sup> The bases of such categorization were linguistic, as the dialects of the local population, which till the Qing resembled those of Shaanxi, merged with that of the middle provinces, creating a diverse but internally uniform system.<sup>106</sup> Further linguistic investigations have confirmed that, especially by the twentieth century, there existed a fairly standard, and easy to learn dialect that was shared by most of the population.<sup>107</sup> It was characterized by a large number of borrowings and relatively similar tonal patterns and pronunciation.

The compilers of the 1939 Ba County Gazetteer also expressed a clear view on that matter – local dialect (*fangyan* 方言) was spoken by a majority of the population and no traces of a multilingual environment existed till the war time.<sup>108</sup> For most, the dialect of Sichuan and especially of Chongqing and other ports, sounded rather like a simple merger of the patois known to all who travelled the country to some extent. Few words in it differed from those of the Yangzi valley and analogies were easy to find - to the extent that one 1938 guide devoted to it a mere two pages.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, it was noticeably direct and vulgar.<sup>110</sup> In this respect Eastern Sichuan differed quite sharply from the conditions of Shanghai, which were analyzed by Emily Honig.<sup>111</sup> If there was discrimination it was between the people who claimed foreign roots, rich merchants, whether of the Eight Provinces in Qing following the *huiguan* establishments or of the Lower Yangzi (*xiajiang* 下江) during the Republic, and

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<sup>105</sup> Lan Yong 藍勇, Huang Quansheng 黃權生. 2009. *Huguang tian Sichuan yu Qingdai Sichuan shehui* 湖廣填四川與清代四川社會. Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe: 196-198.

<sup>106</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 823.

<sup>107</sup> Lan Yong and Huang Quansheng: 203-212.

<sup>108</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 824-851 describes the borrowings and explains differences in meaning. Large migrations of wartime refugees, especially from Middle and Lower Yangzi revived the notion of multiple origins, and it seems, also a particular reading of Chongqing and Sichuan history.

<sup>109</sup> *Lüyu xiangdao*: 4-6.

<sup>110</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 821-822. Tan Hong claimed that the mixed dialects receded in nineteenth century. Previous dialects were seen by officials and literati as harmful and heterodox. Tan Hong 譚紅. 2006. *Bashu yiminshi* 巴蜀移民史. Chengdu: Bashu shushe: Sichuan chubanshe: 744-779.

<sup>111</sup> Emily Honig. "The Politics of Prejudice: Subei People in Republican-Era Shanghai," *Modern China*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Jul., 1989): 243-274.

those who called themselves locals. Such separation appears to have been entirely class based and was a projection of diverse social status existing within the cities, not factual linguistic differences.

When we look in this context at Sichuan boatmen, we need to underline their roots in the rural migration to towns and cities. For this reason, we cannot speak of them in the same terms as historians do of the working class migrants to Shanghai. This differentiation was due to a multi-step migration process where workers came not from distant provinces of diverse cultural background, but usually from the nearby countryside. As we have seen, Sichuan was resettled by farmers and they formed the largest share of human flow in the eighteenth century. In contrast to Shanghai, which attracted large groups of culturally diverse people starting from the 1850s, the growth of Sichuan cities was divorced from intra-provincial migrations. As the data collected by Wang Di shows, the process of urban growth in Eastern Sichuan followed three stages: migration to the province, settlement in the villages, and rural-urban migration.<sup>112</sup> It was only the last stage that produced a sufficient labor pool to fill boatmen jobs and, conversely, boat workers were rooted in a century and a half of homogenization within the rural environment of the province and its recreated networks of economic and social exchange.

### **Economy and Society**

Apart from cultural change, the process of resettlement triggered an economic awakening of Eastern Sichuan. But in contrast to the previous post-Mongol reconstruction, it was hugely augmented by two concurrent changes in the world and in Chinese economy. Firstly, due to the introduction of New World crops (such as corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts etc.), Sichuan's hilly lands went fully under cultivation for the first time.<sup>113</sup> Secondly, the inflow of merchants from other regions and the growth of market towns changed previous autarkic border economies into a networked marketing structure. Links between small markets were established along the rivers, which were exploited as avenues of trade and transportation. Convergence of these two processes brought to both Chongqing and many other towns unprecedented prosperity.

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<sup>112</sup> Wang Di, 1989: 310-326.

<sup>113</sup> P. J. Smith: 37-41.



The agricultural ‘revolution’ achieved by the adoption of New World crops helped to diminish the autarky of Sichuan’s provincial and super-provincial food market. With the transshipment of food stuffs, denser web of market towns and developing granary system (both privately, *huiguan*, and government run), it was possible to abandon absolute dependence on rice production, and focus on growing cash crops. The most profitable of these to emerge in the nineteenth century was opium, of which Sichuan was the major provider in terms of quantity in China.<sup>114</sup> Bringing the mountainous regions under cultivation would have been barely possible without the coincident growth of market towns and their trading communities. It appears that this process was fed by a number of simultaneous developments of eighteenth century China: peaceful years brought a sharp increase in population and sped up sophistication of the urban markets boosted by rising demand and growing consumption.<sup>115</sup> Another underlying factor in this trade was the activity of cosmopolitan merchants who, within the timeframe of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, spanned the province with a web of more than 1,500 co-provincial guildhalls. At the same time Sichuan was covered by a network of Shanxi banks (*piaohao* 票號), which extended credit to trade and government. By the end of Qianlong’s 乾隆 reign (1735-1796) Eastern Sichuan had evolved from a provincial backwater into an integrated element of the imperial economy.<sup>116</sup>

While not denying the importance of the mid-Qing years, the heyday of the Eastern Sichuan economy unquestionably belongs to the nineteenth century. Although our quantitative data is quite unreliable, we can still ascertain a substantial surge in urban population and a considerable amount of both public and private investment in this period. This was directed particularly toward charity organizations, *huiguan* compounds, temple construction and

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<sup>114</sup> David Bello. “The Venomous Course of Southwestern Opium: Qing Prohibition in Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Nov., 2003): 1109-1142. On the importance of opium on government revenue under warlord rule of Liu Xiang 劉湘: Zhang Jin 張瑾. 2003. *Quanli, chongtu yu biange – 1926-1937 nian Chongqing chengshi xiandaihua yanjiu* 權力衝突與變革 – 1926-1937 年重慶城市現代化研究. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe.

<sup>115</sup> Tan Hong 譚紅 quoted an opinion of many late-Qing scholars that Sichuan life was rather dull, unsophisticated by the capital standards, but moral (渾樸時代, *hunpu shidai*); but last decades of Qing it however became messy, pleasure obsessed and demoralized as in other developed regions in China. Tan Hong: 779. For a critique see: Introduction.

<sup>116</sup> Samuel A. M Adshead. 1984. *Province and Politics in Late Imperial China: Viceregal Government in Szechwan, 1898-1911*. Surrey: Curzon Press: 1-25. Liang Ling 梁凌, Liang Pinghan 梁平漢. 2010. *Bashu shangdao* 巴蜀商道. Chengdu: Bashu shushe: 30-31.

renovation, all betraying activity on the part of local government. The main change however was in the area of urbanization. Chongqing grew from a town of 30,000 people in 1812 into a supra-regional metropolis with a population exceeding 300,000 by the 1890s. Proportional surges have been noted for other, previously obscure townships, such as Dazu 大足, Hechuan 合川, Wanxian 萬縣 or Jiangjin 江津. By the end of the nineteenth century all of these cities had turned into thriving and regionally influential centers.<sup>117</sup>

More importantly, the growing prosperity of that period was dependent on the existence and expansion of the river transportation network. Eastern Sichuan's merchants, whether opulent salt-monopoly holders or petty traders, all depended on the river system to a much greater extent than on the derelict and dangerous roads. In fact, the possibility of accessing remote areas via the rivers and local know-how in tackling often difficult waterways was a *sine qua non* for the development of the region. This claim is supported by evidence of the creation of certain amenities for hauling boats up Yangzi currents already in the early Ming times (such as tow paths, life boats etc.).<sup>118</sup> We cannot thus rely on any simple causative pattern of evolution of Eastern Sichuan, since many of its elements preceded the nineteenth century surge in local prosperity. In this period the network of regional trade, the river area of Sichuan was finally formed, and the social groups we are interested in emerged with their full forms of organization.<sup>119</sup>

It seems, on the basis of available sources, that the secular trend of regional economic and social development was not altered by the upheavals of the nineteenth century, such as the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864).<sup>120</sup> On the contrary, the growth of population, market activity, trade, and forms of social differentiation continued within previously established patterns,

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<sup>117</sup> Wang Di, 1989: 310-378.

<sup>118</sup> Zhou Yong, 2002: 393.

<sup>119</sup> As accurately observed by Skinner, the regional network systems, in the form represented by his models existed fully only from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Skinner, *Regional Urbanization*: 220-249.

<sup>120</sup> The last Qing decades, although without major disasters were not free of social strife, anti-Christian massacres from 1880s till 1902, and rural upheavals against new taxation following 1905 Reforms and, massive anti-Qing activity in 1911. See: Bradley W. Reed. "Money and Justice: Clerks, Runners, and the Magistrate's Court in Late Imperial Sichuan," *Modern China*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jul., 1995): 345-382. Judith Wyman. 1993. *Social Change, Antiforeignism and Revolution in China: Chongqing prefecture, 1870s to 1911*. PhD diss. University of Michigan. Judith Wyman. "The Ambiguity of Chinese Antiforeignism: Chongqing 1870-1900," *Late Imperial China*, Vol.18, No.2 (Dec., 1997): 86-122. Wei Yingtao 隗瀛濤. 1981. *Sichuan baolu yundong shi* 四川保路運動史. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe: Sichuansheng Xinhua shudian faxing.

or were even strengthened by the new opportunities created by opening Chongqing to foreign trade in 1890. The same can be repeated for the, from the economic perspective, rather disreputable years of the Republic, which for the urban network of Eastern Sichuan stand out as a time of prosperity. That however cannot be said for exceedingly exploited rural hinterland.<sup>121</sup> One of the main reasons for such stability lay in the particularities of the local labor market and the technical know-how in operating a large scale trade network – the main source of Eastern Sichuan’s wealth. The other was the exploitative nature of this trade, based mostly on extracting borderland (mountain and forest) produce and cash crops, obtained in an agricultural system characterized by the highest concentration of landownership in China (and consequent prevalence of tenant farmers and farm laborers over land-owning small farmers).<sup>122</sup>

As regards Chongqing, the social structure that supported the system of regional economy differed in many respects from other imperial cities, though, to a certain extent, it was similar to that of contemporary Shanghai. Chongqing, which became a regional metropolis, its main warehouse and wholesale center, concentrated within itself most of the company headquarters and banks. A British report on the local trade issued in 1898 stated that:

On December 25 we reached Ch’ung-king, the commercial capital of Ssu-ch’uan; the map will show the commanding position it occupies in respect of the exchange of products between the Lower Yang-tze Valley and Ssu-ch’uan, with every considerable town in which it is connected by water; and it must be borne in mind that wholesale trade is carried on almost entirely here by boat. Exports bound for the Lower Yang-tze and abroad must pass it, and so must the imports brought up in exchange. The result is that, in regard to foreign trade entirely, and in regard to internal provincial trade to a very large extent, Ch’ung-king is the wholesale market for the province and

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<sup>121</sup> On the limitedness of the Great Depression in Sichuan and other Southwest provinces: Wright, Tim. “Distant Thunder: The Regional Economies of Southwest China and the Impact of the Great Depression,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 34, No. 3 (2000): 697-738. For growing rural urban divide, see: Zhang Jin: 335-366.

<sup>122</sup> Joshua H. Howard. 2004. *Workers at War: Labor in China’s Arsenal, 1937-1953*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 90-93. Madeleine Zelin. “The Rights of Tenants in Mid-Qing Sichuan: A Study of Land-Related Law in Baxian Archives,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (May, 1986): 499-526. The landownership pattern did not change during the Republic. Instead the land was redistributed from the old owners to those who rose up through warlord patronage: Richard Gunde. “Land Tax and Social Change in Sichuan, 1925-1935,” *Modern China*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1976): 23-48.

the only one. Here it is that the merchant and shopkeeper of the whole province come to buy foreign goods.<sup>123</sup>

The class of businessmen, at least till the end of the Qing, consisted mostly of people claiming foreign origin who cooperated through the networks of *huiguan* and after 1912, *tongxianghui* 同鄉會 co-provincial association establishments.<sup>124</sup> The extent of their power was displayed through the splendid construction of their compounds, which allegedly were the most prominent buildings to be seen in Chongqing and other cities in the region.<sup>125</sup> Large scale trade was not the only motor of the local economy, and cities relied heavily on the petty-capitalist family-run enterprises, which provided the majority of urban employment well into the 1930s.<sup>126</sup>

More importantly, Chongqing was not a center of production, and its delayed industrialization moved only sluggishly in the late-Qing and Republican years. In fact, each sector of its economy and the survival of an urban center of such size depended on a class of boat people who strenuously labored up and down local rivers. Inside the cities and on the land routes a similar dependence was visible – geographical difficulties and reliance on traditional technology forced/pushed most of the work of transportation onto the shoulders of coolies, sedan chair carriers etc. The Eastern Sichuan economy was indeed based on human muscle; with a limited number of draft animals, and a lack and later scarcity of

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<sup>123</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office. 1898. "Report on the Trade of Central and Southern China. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, May, 1898." *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, No. 458 Miscellaneous Series: 29.

<sup>124</sup> Sichuansheng defangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省地方志編纂委員會. 2000. *Sichuansheng zhi: Minsu zhi* 四川省志: 民俗志. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe: 377-380.

<sup>125</sup> "The guild-houses are much the finest buildings in this country; here the Chinese expresses his ideal of magnificence. We visited the guild-house of Hu-kuang, i.e., the Hupeh and Hunan provinces; the main part of the enclosure consisted of a broad open space well flagged with stone between a temple and a theatrical stage. Theatricals and religion are very closely allied in China. Behind the temple were committee rooms, and there are in the same enclosure that temples and halls peculiarly belonging to certain prefectures, e.g., Huang-chow Fu, the great cotton district close to Hankow, in the precincts of which the Kung-so, or association of raw cotton importers, holds its meetings." *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*: 29. On the function of co-provincial associations, *huiguan* and *gongsuo* 公所 see: Goodman, 1995. For more recent study, covering functions, development and regional particularities see: Wang Rigen 王日根. 2007. *Zhongguo huiguan shi* 中國會館史. Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin. From the last years of the nineteenth century, Chambers of commerce became the main form of merchant association – for the path breaking study on their socio-political role, see: Chen Zhongping. 2011. *Modern China's Network Revolution: Chambers of Commerce and Sociopolitical Change in the Early Twentieth Century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

<sup>126</sup> "Laogong gaikuang" 勞工概況, *Sichuan yuebao* 四川月報第二卷第一期, Feb. 1933: 5-9.

steam, coal or oil engines, power was extracted with human sweat. With no substitute, the solution was found in specialization, manual techniques and minute organization; and the growth of economic activity was based on free labor and the creation of a whole class of desperate wage laborers who accepted exhausting work for even a meager income. All these aspects are going to be discussed in detail in the following section.

When and to what degree did this reliance on human muscle power decrease in the period of our interest? When were traditional boat hauling techniques superseded by steam and oil powered boats? Investigating this question requires coping with conflicting opinions and often casual remarks by journalists and travelers to the region, which negate quantitative data produced by state institutions. The opinion that long-haul travel and cargo between Chongqing and Yichang 宜昌 (Hubei province) ceased to be moved on wooden men-pulled boats and was managed by steamers as early as the late 1920s seems to be exaggerated. According to Wei Yingtao, who consulted Maritime Customs documents on the subject, the wooden boat trade in the port of Chongqing experienced its boom years (with brief falls during the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命, 1911) from the 1890s till the early 1920s. According to Zhou Yong and most mainstream Chinese historians, the following decade brought a sharp fall in the number of traditional vessels calling at Chongqing, coming almost to a standstill by 1930. A brief revival was said to occur during the war years, when Eastern Sichuan became the capital region (1938-1945) to be ultimately suppressed by the modernization and reorganization of labor structure under the People's Republic.<sup>127</sup>

Many of these claims can be securely refuted on the basis of data presented by Zhou Lisan 周立三, Hou Xuetao 侯學燾 and Chen Siqiao 陳泗橋 in their 1946 collection of economic data and maps of Sichuan.<sup>128</sup> According to the authors, there were 82 routes operated only by wooden boats (*muchuan* 木船) as against 7 serviced by both wooden and engine propelled boats (*qichuan* 汽船). Those where engine vessels were used included only major rivers and were not distinguished by the distance travelled. Traditional boats on most routes were used all-year-long, but in around 20% of cases only during the flood season (21 routes).

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<sup>127</sup> Zhou Yong, 2002: 399-400.

<sup>128</sup> *Sichuan jingji ditu*. Statistics volume under the title: *Sichuan jingji ditu shuoming* 四川經濟地圖集說明. Beibei: Zhongguo Dili yanjiusuo.

As for the modern boats in five out of seven cases they were exploited all year round.<sup>129</sup> By 1946, steamboat connections were uninterrupted by seasonal variations, a great technological achievement compared to previous decades (when such ships could only be deployed during summer floods). It did not mean, however that traditional means of transportation were supplanted, or even undermined by more modern competitors. This point has been emphasized in an even more powerful manner by Akira Matsuura in his recent study of the river transport of China.<sup>130</sup> He claimed, on the basis of Chinese local gazetteers, Maritime Customs documents and Japanese Consular Reports that one could see a growing trend of Sichuan traditional shipping starting as early as the 1750s.<sup>131</sup> Sichuan boats used to call at Yichang and Shashi 沙市, as well as in Hankou 漢口 (important ports and tax stations in Hubei). According to a November 1888 Japanese travel guide to Sichuan, there were more than ten thousand such boats calling at Yichang on their route down the Yangzi.<sup>132</sup> By May 1921, as Akira proves on the basis of a Japanese Consular Report from Chongqing, the shipment activity performed by wooden vessels, instead of experiencing a crisis, was flourishing, with thousands of boats moored in the city's docks.<sup>133</sup> If we thus gather the scattered data from various years within the period of our interest, we can see that throughout the nineteenth and the first half of twentieth century, the rivers of Sichuan were an undisputed domain of wooden boats and traditional shipping. Limited incursions of modern technology, in form of steamships, though significant for a number of enterprises, and even more so for the discourse of modernizing politicians and intellectuals, did not overturn the local economy and modes of work.

Similar changes were considered to have occurred in the field of inner city and land transportation. From the establishment of the Republic sluggish road construction projects were initiated, with the demarcation of new routes, the pushing of broad roads through old districts and construction of Sichuan's first highway linking Chongqing to Chengdu (first

<sup>129</sup> *Sichuan jingji ditu ji shuoming*: 118-124.

<sup>130</sup> Akira Matsuura 松浦章, Dong Ke 董科, transl. 2010. *Qingdai neihe shuiyunshi yanjiu* 清代内河水运史研究. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe chuanmei jituan, Jiangsu renmin chubanshe.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*: 24-25.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*: 239. A full text of the 清國四川地方旅行日記拔萃 was published within four numbers of the 通商報告 (1888).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*: 240-243. Original document: 在重慶日領事館內狀況, 外務省通商局, 第一節 (交通), 第一款 (四川省), 第五項 (民船), 125-127.

projected in 1913, finished in 1933).<sup>134</sup> These efforts were accompanied by the establishment of public transportation, most notably the bus system. However fascinating as a contemporary novelty which boosted local pride, these 'modernizations' did not eliminate previous methods of human and goods transportation. It is unnecessary to mention the enormous number of accounts from the region explicitly citing the omnipresence of a human powered mode of shipment in this region late into the twentieth century, in spite of the general unreliability of quantitative data.<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, the scale of change that occurred in middle decades of the twentieth century should be seen as highly questionable, especially if we consider more qualitative sources. H. L. Richardson, who spent extensive time in Southwestern China and especially Sichuan during the Sino-Japanese War, noted that the roads, despite being great achievements of work and engineering, were rather sparse and unsafe. As a proof of that, he quoted overcrowding, weak or very basic road surface and accidents, of which he suffered one himself.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, we need to bear in mind one more issue pertaining to all the data from the region. To quote Sichuan's notable geographer, Joseph Earle Spencer who noted in 1938:

No accurate figures can be given for the volume of domestic trade, since only a portion passes through agencies keeping statistical records. Notwithstanding the widespread use of steam, a very large volume of domestic traffic is still by native boats. Only on the Lower Yangtze (below Hankow [Hankou]) is the bulk of traffic by regular steam lines, and here only may the Customs returns be considered representative today. The increasing Customs returns indicate a decrease in native,

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<sup>134</sup> Zhou Yong, 2002: 414-417.

<sup>135</sup> In April, 1938, *The Times*, with an annoying subtext of cultural superiority noted: "Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador, and Lady Kerr arrived yesterday by air from Hankow. The aeroplane landed on the mud-bank underneath the steep bluff from which the temporary capital of China looks across the Yangtze to the mountains, and the party, having come from Hankow at 180 miles an hour, stepped back, as it were, into Middle Ages, and were carried in sedan chairs up the zigzag flight of steps cut in the cliff towards the city. The Ambassador's chair was particularly imposing contraption let for the occasion by Mr. Lin Sen, President of the Chinese National Government, to whom Sir Archibald will present his Letters of Credence on Tuesday." "British Ambassador at Chungking: By Aeroplane and Sedan Chair," *The Times*, Monday, April 11, 1938: 12. Wartime guides to Chongqing recommended using sedan chairs for all those unaccustomed to mountains and stairs: Du Ruozhi 杜若之. 1938. *Lüyu xiangdao* 旅渝嚮導. Chongqing bayu chubanshe: 12-13.

<sup>136</sup> H. L. Richardson. "Szechwan during the War," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 106, No. 1/2 (Jul. – Aug., 1945): 11-13.

unmeasured shipping and the growing efficiency of the Customs authorities in statistical tabulation.<sup>137</sup>

Finally an interesting insight from as late as 1956 provides us with another argument against drawing too sharp time borders for the decline of 'the old ways.' Paweł Jasienica, a Polish historian and journalist ventured in that year to Eastern Sichuan. He reported an extensive use of human power in all mentioned sectors, namely boat pulling and in shipping goods within cities. According to Jasienica, most of the socialist construction and port operations in Chongqing were done by coolies who could rely neither on trucks nor port facilities (cranes, elevators).<sup>138</sup> He also saw a noticeable number of wooden boats in the Yangzi gorges, whose routes paralleled those of steamers.<sup>139</sup>

Although we can always be skeptical as to the accuracy of such casual accounts, they give us an indication of the survival of forms of labor and associated culture among the working class of Eastern Sichuan. The structure of labor and prevailing reliance on human muscle-power transcended the political and economic changes of the 1940s and 1950s and persisted largely unchanged till full mechanization was achieved in relatively recent times.<sup>140</sup> At the same time, we should pay attention to the power of change unleashed by the partial modernization of the early decades of the twentieth century. The introduction of steamers on the main Yangzi route between Yichang and Chongqing condemned scores of river workers to unemployment, poverty (relative to their previous condition) and criminalization. The dramatic rise in banditry in the region throughout Republican decades, although mostly blamed on Communist activity<sup>141</sup>, also had its sources in destroyed lifestyles. By the 1930s,

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<sup>137</sup> Joseph Earle Spencer. "Trade and Transshipment in the Yangtze Valley," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Jan., 1938): 115. Spencer noted the destruction of traditional junk shipping on the main Yangzi line: Yichang-Chongqing, but almost no competition on the lesser lines. Most competition came from Chinese owned and British owned steamers. Ibid: 122.

<sup>138</sup> Paweł Jasienica. 2008 (1957). *Kraj nad Jangcy*. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka: 185-188.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid: 207.

<sup>140</sup> For the areas outside main trade channel of Yangzi it occurred as late as 1970s; the change, such as enabling night-time navigation, of navigation conditions on Yangzi was largely achieved in the early 1960s: D. J. Dwyer. "The Development of China's Inland Waterways," *Geography*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1961): 165-167.

<sup>141</sup> "The life of a river steamer captain is very much like that of a Merchant Service captain in the Great War. There are no submarines to worry about, but although the bandits have quaint ideas of shooting and the ammunition of their artillery is more varied than effective, the idiosyncrasies of the Yangtze prevent the steamers from keeping to the middle of the channel and necessitate a zigzag course. Thus ample opportunities are provided for the merest tyro to find a target." Previously the bandits are specified as "bandit-Communist[s]." "Problems with river navigation for foreign steamers," *The Times*, Saturday, February 21, 1931: 11.



observations relating to tarnished community life and social degeneration of the river workers had become a standard comment on the conditions of life in this part of Sichuan, expressed both by Chinese and Western observers.<sup>142</sup> In relation to the evidence above, we have to be cautious both when reading such descriptions and when basing general assumptions on them concerning developments in the period. The traditional modes of labor, although threatened by the introduction of new technology and competition of steam shipping companies, were far from disappearing. This was so largely because the change was qualitative rather than quantitative; also because political developments (especially warfare) created limitations and contingencies preventing outright “modernizations.”



Figure 2: City of Chongqing on the Guangxu twelve year (1886) “General Map of the Prefecture of Chongqing” (《重慶府治全圖》, “Chongqing fuzhi quantu”); source: Li Linfang 李林昉, Lei Changde 雷昌德. 2007. *Lao Ditu* 老地圖. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe: 2-3.

<sup>142</sup> Xiangshang deng zhu 向尚等著. 1936. *Xinan luxingji zaxie* 西南旅行記稞寫. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju: 310. Henry George Woodhead. 1931. *Yangtze and Its Problems*. Shanghai: Mercury Press: 30. Apart from Woodhead, almost none of the authors considered the Great Depression to be a cause of the social and economic degradation of boatmen communities. Woodhead understood the crisis well but insisted that steamers were the main cause of traditional boatmen unemployment. See: Wright, 2000: 697-738.

## Workers of Sichuan, an Overview

The scale of the economic and social changes between the 1880s and 1930s influenced the composition of Eastern Sichuan's labor force. At the same time, the very limited intrusion of industrialization, both in areas of production and transportation, did not undermine the traditional division of labor. Instead it caused a growth in numbers and sophistication of the professions that existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In this section, I will provide a short overview of the labor force in the province and from this background proceed to a detailed analysis of the professional characteristics of boatmen.

Certainly the largest single sector of the labor force in the province was made up of farm tenants.<sup>143</sup> Even though this group provided most of the migrants to the cities as well as temporarily undertaking waged labor as seasonal trackers in river gorges, they are of very limited interest to us.

In the world of Eastern Sichuan cities, boatmen were also overwhelmed by other groups. Before 1937 the local economy was rather traditional, meaning that the industrial sector employed only a fraction of the work force amounting to approximately 3,500 people. In January 1933, *Sichuan Monthly* (Sichuan yuebao), a prominent journal published by the Chongqing branch of the Bank of China (Zhongguo yinhang 中國銀行), published a social survey describing the conditions of the urban working class. It shows that most of the workforce was absorbed into the urban market as servants, shopkeepers, and shop apprentices, as the city was the main trading center of the Eastern Sichuan and its streets were lined with shops and stalls.<sup>144</sup> Craftsmen matched industrial workers in number.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> See works of: Howard, Zelin, and Gunde: op. cit.

<sup>144</sup> For detailed data see: Tang Youfeng 唐幼峰. 1933. *Chongqing luxing zhinan* 重慶旅行指南. Chongqing: Chongqing luxing zhinanshe: 21-29. For the central city district the situation barely altered till at least the mid-1940s, even in spite of a growing industrial sector (that for security and logistic reasons was placed in the suburbs): Yang Shicai 楊世才. 1944. *Chongqing zhinan* 重慶指南. Chongqing zhinan bianjibu: 105-109; *Sichuan yuebao*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January), 1933: 5-6.

<sup>145</sup> Wei Yingtao calculated that factory workers were 7.77% of the whole work-force; 0.04% were mine workers; transportation sector stood at 9.18%, household services (maids and servants): 28.08%, public sector (including officials, soldiers and policemen): 1.92%; self-employed (doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists, monks etc.): 2.14 %; not working (students, old/sick/handicapped, criminals): 29.1%; unemployed (*shiye* 失業): 1.66%. Wei Yingtao, 1991: 429-430. Robert A. Kapp. "Chungking as a Center of Warlord Power, 1926-1937" in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*. Mark Elvin, G. William Skinner, eds. 1974. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 143-170. *Sichuan yuebao*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January), 1933: 4-5.

Other workers such as rickshaw pullers, sedan chair carriers, and porters could also be counted in thousands, not to mention soldiers and forced labor in the warlord periods.<sup>146</sup> Dock workers and loaders were two important professions in Eastern Sichuan and, at least for the survey compilers, they constituted a separate group. *Sichuan Monthly* listed 3,500 and 1,100 people engaged in each of these jobs.<sup>147</sup> A substantial number of urban inhabitants were also unemployed, or did not have any defined profession which would be possible to classify within a survey.<sup>148</sup> This stratification of labor seems to have been quite stable from the beginning of the nineteenth till the mid twentieth century, irrespective of growth in population. At the lowest level, the situation was probably rather fluid as unskilled workers moved from one profession to another and huge changes in the market created by open port status both destroyed and nourished new guilds and companies. Finally, the reverse migration of temporary villagers back to their native communes has not been researched and we can only speculate as to its importance for urban economies in this period.

Within this pool of labor, boatmen occupied a substantial position and their numbers soared in the period of our interest. Even though quite inaccurate, various assessments point to at least a few hundred thousand people occupied with river work. What caused the growth of this profession, how was it organized, how were the workers procured and to what extent we can call them an urban phenomenon are going to be the questions addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

## Organization of Boatmen Labor: Guilds and Workers of the Rivers

The information obtained by historians is painfully incoherent and inconclusive, only betraying how undeveloped the field of business history of China is.<sup>149</sup> The analysis presented below will unfortunately reflect some of these inconsistencies. Since the period

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<sup>146</sup> *Sichuan yuebao*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January), 1933: 7-8. *Shuyou xinying*: 41-43. During the years of Sichuan civil war in the 1920s and 30s military press-ganging was allegedly a popular form of procuring labor, especially in the transportation sector: Diana Lary. 1985. *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Solders, 1911-1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>147</sup> Dock workers – *matou yunshu gongren* 碼頭運輸工人; dock loaders – *matou tizhuang gongren* 碼頭提裝工人: *Sichuan yuebao*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January), 1933: 7.

<sup>148</sup> Wie Yingtao, 1991: op.cit.

<sup>149</sup> David Faure. 2006. *China and Capitalism: A History of Business Enterprise in Modern China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press: 2.

was characterized by many new organizations, as well as changing scales and size of economic activity conducted, my interpretation is that these discrepancies reflect two problems. Firstly, the question arises as to by whom, where and for what purpose the surveys were conducted. The differences in perspective between a Maritime Customs survey from Chongqing and the Japanese Consulate in Hankou and Chongqing are immediately visible and explainable. Secondly, the dynamic period for trade of which we are speaking, was equally conducive to the establishment of new organizations as to the demise of old companies. In this area, our knowledge is extremely limited, yet we can still assume from disparate data that a state of flux was more the norm than an exception in this period.

Here we will no longer discuss co-provincial guild halls, which brought together and benefited mostly the more affluent class of merchants. Our focus falls on other forms of grouping and self-management of local level economic groups. The basic organizational unit of petty traders, artisans and workers was the guild (*hangbang* 行幫). In Chongqing, as in other developed (not borderland) urban centers in China, most labor was sectioned within professionally specialized guilds. Each of them represented one trade, and provided for the veneration of gods, maintenance of a temple or altar and a charity hall. As demonstrated by Peter J. Golas, guilds functioned especially to perpetuate a craft's rituals through which cohesion among its members was enforced (thus maintaining a standard of training and quality of production and services).<sup>150</sup> Golas claimed that their influence on particular members was limited.

Evidence from Eastern Sichuan, however, suggests otherwise and the theory of David Faure that these ritual organizations were in fact a form of business incorporation seems to find some confirmation in our sources.<sup>151</sup> If guilds catered rather to the needs of the entrepreneurial class of boat-owners, then workers (trackers, rowers etc.) did not operate in a free, unregulated market. There is no evidence concerning boatmen's associations (*bang* 幫), but we have enough information to infer the existence of secret society run patronage networks, which procured and controlled the labor force in the main cities. A proportion of

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<sup>150</sup> Peter J. Golas. "Early Ch'ing Guilds" in: Skinner, G. William. 1995 (1977). *The City in Late Imperial China*. Taipei: SMC Publishing: 555-580.

<sup>151</sup> Faure: 31-44.

river workers were employed only seasonally supplementing the incomes earned through farm labor.

## Guilds

In all the period of our interest here, both land and water transportation guilds were essential actors in organizing and managing business. The large scale development of Yangzi shipping during Ming-Qing times and the creation of hauling paths were also paralleled by the growth and specialization of guilds, the opening of new offices and the establishment of rules of operation and employment.<sup>152</sup>

Wei Yingtao claims that, by 1878, Chongqing harbor was crowded with boats belonging to 24 diverse guilds, out of which eight dealt with down-Yangzi shipping, seven with up-Yangzi shipping, four operated on the Jialing, and five were concerned with ferrying activity between three districts of the Chongqing agglomeration (Chongqing in the center, Nanyan in the South, the county town of Jiangbei in the North).<sup>153</sup> More than forty years later, according to Akira Matsuura, there were 14 guilds in Chongqing representing not different directions of shipment, but the interests of various groups of origin. Most of them belonged to people from Sichuan (Chongqing, Wanxian, Yunyang 雲陽, Kaixian 開縣, Zhongxian 忠縣), Hubei (Guizhou 歸州, Hanyang 漢陽), and other provinces such as Guangdong or Zhejiang. There was also one guild exclusively for foreigners (專屬外國商人者).<sup>154</sup> Akira also stated that at least from 1905 the dominant trade guild on the Upper Yangzi was Yu Guild (Yuhang 渝行, Yu meaning Chongqing), which by 1914 managed 212 big junks.<sup>155</sup> In the same period, the overall number of boats managed by these guilds was estimated to have reached twenty thousand, with more than 1,000 moving between Chongqing and Yichang.<sup>156</sup> Figures for the number of wooden boats entering Chongqing, provided by Wang Di for the period between

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<sup>152</sup> Wei Yingtao, 1991: 325. Look also: Li Jinrong 李金榮. 2007. *Laohangdang* 老行當. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe: 85-92. Akira: 226.

<sup>153</sup> Wei Yingtao, 1991: 326.

<sup>154</sup> Akira: 127-130.

<sup>155</sup> “渝行者，出入四川貨物之同漕商行之稱謂也。其名稱來自重慶之別名—渝行。（光緒三十一，1905）的“揚子江汽船調查報告”（大阪市立圖書館館藏，盡記有本科生田島繁二。大阪市立圖書館的登錄印日號碼為 14965，日期明治三十九年（1906）4 月 26 日）：Akira: 238; 321-322.

<sup>156</sup> Akira: 250-251.

1891 and 1912, confirm these figures: 607 for the year 1891, up to 2,908 in 1899 and then falling to an average of more than 2,300 in the following decade.<sup>157</sup>

The change in guild numbers, specialization and structure could reflect an evolution of trade patterns in the region and its increasing links with other provinces and the broader world. It could also be evidence of different perspectives in the sources compiled by both historians. Certainly neither element of the trade network was abandoned, nor did guild structure undergo much reform. It seems also that this structure persisted till the outbreak of the Second World War. The *Travel Guide to Chongqing*, a business directory published in 1933, confirms that their existence and specialization went unaltered and also gives us some detail about the way they operated. The guild offices (*shiwusuo* 事務所) were located by the river gates, in the docks, and provided services for the shipment of both passengers and merchandise.<sup>158</sup>

The guilds were specialized not only according to the route taken by particular boats, but also to the type of boats and consequently the goods transported on them. Maritime Customs data from the years 1882-1891, quoted by Akira stated that Sichuan people engaged in the transportation of wood, sugar, salt, medical herbs, rice, coal and passengers.<sup>159</sup> This structure did not change much in the following decades. In 1921, according to Japanese consular reports, one more general object was added to the previous list of shipments from Sichuan: *huowu* 貨物 – goods or merchandise.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Wang Di, 2002: 42.

<sup>158</sup> *Chongqing lüxing zhinan*: 18.

<sup>159</sup> Akira: 235-237.

<sup>160</sup> A May 1921 document: *Zai Chongqing jiulingshiguannei zhuangkuang* 在重慶舊領事館內狀況, Waiwusheng tongshangju 外務省通商局, Diyijie (jiaotong) 第一節 (交通), diyikuang (Sichuansheng) 第一款 (四川省), Diwuxing (minchuan) 第五項 (民船) : Ibid: 240-241.



Figure 3: Salt boats moored at Wushan County dock (巫山縣) <http://2010.cqlib.cn/Upfile/oldpic/老码头/其他河流码头/老关嘴码头/巫山县盐积船.jpg>

The type of goods shipped, their quantity and the river on which they were moved required the use of different boats. According to a Maritime Customs report from 1892, Chongqing was visited by 47 types of boats, each differing in size, shape, goods transported, origin, and number of crew.<sup>161</sup> If we are to search for a general statement in all this variety, the typical boat was probably of middle size, with a crew fluctuating around 20 members. A first-hand description of such a boat was recorded by Archibald Little in his travel diary of the voyage from Yichang to Chongqing, which he undertook in 1887:

[The boat] is about forty feet long and three deep; carries [...] down-stream 10,000 catties (six tones) and up-stream 4,000 catties (two and a half tones). It is now laden with about one ton of luggage and stores (including several piculs of rice for the crew, numbering six in all), besides five passengers who form our party – making the draft just fourteen inches; but the peculiarity of the boat is her lightness of build,

<sup>161</sup> “重慶關稅務司好博遜給總務務司的報告” (February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1892). Quoted by Wei Yingtao, 1991: 327.

resembling in that respect the rapid boats of Japan: built of oak planking, she has no timbers, no flooring, and, except forward, no deck; but she is held together by five bulkheads which divide the central portion of the boat into four holds, besides the tapering bow and stern, in the former of which are the crew's quarters and galley, and in the latter reside our cook, with his portable earthenware stove, and the helmsman. We in the centre are thus literally between two fires, and get the benefit of the acrid wood-smoke from whichever side the wind comes. The planking is one inch only, and as the place of the flooring is taken by a sort of light bamboo platform at the bottom of each hold, which the cargo rest, the whole has great elasticity, and three men run her along at three to four miles an hour against a two-knot current with the greatest ease; besides she is unharmed by the continual bumping to which she is subjected in her long-shore voyaging.<sup>162</sup>

The Maritime Customs report mentioned also smaller units with 3 or 4 people onboard, as well as much bigger ones, crewed by 50 or up to 73 people. More specific data was provided by Japanese merchants from Shashi (January, 1897): "Going from Yichang to Chongqing, the number of people on merchant boats differed whether it was dry or flood season. Irrespective of that, the heavy junk employed on average sixteen people on board, one attached boat [so called: *wubanchuan* 五板船] (which explored the way or provided rescue) requiring eight people; [all] needed eighty four trackers [*yeshou*, 曳手]."<sup>163</sup> For middle size junks it sufficed to have twelve people on board, four on the pilot boat and forty three trackers. For small vessels these numbers were, ten on board and twenty boat pullers, no pilot/rescue boat required. The same document shows how much more labor was required to cross the Yangzi rapids. For big junks, up to 150 trackers; for middle-sized ones: 100; small ones: 60. The journey time differed when navigating during flood or dry seasons. Whereas on the former the trip took from thirty to fifty days, on the latter from twenty to thirty days were sufficient. Traveling down Yangzi, from Chongqing to Yichang was less troublesome and much quicker (from ten to eighteen days maximum). Additionally, it was not necessary to

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<sup>162</sup> Little: 76-77. The boat was also equipped with a mast and sail used during downriver voyages: *ibid*: 78.

<sup>163</sup> Akira: 239.



employ trackers, but only a sufficient number of rowers. Heavy junks required a crew of seventy, middle size ones forty, and small ones from twenty to thirty.<sup>164</sup>

More than twenty years later (1921) a Japanese Consular Report from Chongqing specified the number of workers required for journeys up and down river according to the tonnage of junks. It proposed a division of workers into two groups: trackers (*yeshou*) and water laborers (*shuifu*). To give two extremes, a two hundred ton boat going up-river needed six trackers and twenty water laborers. Going down river, it required only twenty workers. Conversely, a seven hundred ton vessel could move against the current with seventeen trackers and eighty water laborers; with the current it needed a force of seventy workers.<sup>165</sup>

With this detailed data, we can infer a distinction between the boat crew and its workforce (trackers, rowers etc.), since the former were entrepreneurs, providers of skilled labor, and/or shareholders, while the latter sold their labor for wages (*chuanyuan* 船員). Most of the employers were small family enterprises – the husbands were boat captains, while their wives and children traveled together, treating the boats as their households.<sup>166</sup> Additionally, specialized pilots or helmsmen could be shareholders in each boating enterprise. Their specialized knowledge of sometimes very difficult Yangzi, Jialing and other rivers navigation placed them both in terms of salary and social position well above trackers and swimmers who performed the most menial tasks. Boats also had cooks and supervisors who also stayed

<sup>164</sup> Akira: 239.

<sup>165</sup> Suoyao shuifu ji yefu zhi dagai renshu ruzuo 所要水夫及曳夫之大概人数如左 [Number of river workers and trackers necessary according to boat size]

Boat size	Up-river journey		Down-river journey
River laborers	Trackers 曳手	Water laborers 水夫	
200 tons	6 people	20 people	20 people
300 tons	8 people	30 people	30 people
400 tons	12 people	50 people	30 people
500 tons	15 people	60 people	40 people
700 tons	17 people	80 people	70 people

Akira: 242.

<sup>166</sup> For a description of such households see: George C. Basil Lewis, Elizabeth Foreman. 1940. *Test Tubes and Dragon Scales*. Chicago: The John C. Winston Company: 222. For a short biography of Basil and analysis of his writing see: Nicole Elizabeth Barnes. 2011. "Bei yisheng: yi wei Meiguo xuechuan jiaoshi zai Chongqing" 貝醫生：一位美國學傳教士在重慶, in Nan'an qu zhengxie 南岸區政協, ed. *Kaibu wenhua zhuanji: Chongqingshi Nan'anqu lishi wenhua xilie congshu* 開埠文化專輯：重慶市南岸區歷史文化系列叢書. Chongqing: Nan'an zhengxie chubanshe, 2011: 255-261.

on board for most of the time and were never engaged in boat pulling.<sup>167</sup> From the Maritime Customs Decennial Report of 1882-1891, we can see that boats could have had from two to eighteen such crew members, and this number was not determined by the boat's size or weight. For example, two types of salt-transporting units, one coming to Chongqing from Hezhou 合州 (Hechuan) with 2000 dan 担 (circa 50kg) of cargo had six crew members and another coming from Guizhou with 800 dan of cargo had nine crew members. This disparity could have been a consequence of the length of journey or difficulty posed by the river. Of all the units, the ones having the biggest crew were those crossing the Yangzi Gorges on the way from Chongqing to Yichang, usually amounting to a dozen or more members.<sup>168</sup>

### **Procuring Labor**

The boat laborers, on the other hand, were a more diverse group. Some were employed almost permanently (and those constitute the numbers provided by Akira), others undertook the job only seasonally. The distinction was especially acute in the way their labor was procured. Seasonal trackers hailed from the villages bordering main rivers and in the slack season occupied themselves with boat hauling on the difficult stretches of the rivers. Usually they were employed by the boat's captain, who entering the settlement was quickly surrounded by a crowd willing to take any job for cash. The desperate need and perhaps relative ease in earning a little money made this work attractive supposedly even for women.<sup>169</sup> We do not have any detailed data as to the number of people who engaged in such work. It must however have been sizable, since to move one boat across a gorge several hundred hands were needed. Isabella Bird noted that "Each boat carries enough men to pull her up against the strong stream, but at a rapid she needs many more, and during the navigation season coolies from long distances migrate to the river and put up mat huts as close to it as possible, to which dealers in food, tobacco, *samshu*, and opium at once gravitate, along with sellers of bamboo tow-ropes. Nor are rough amusements wanting. Rough, dirty, noisy, these temporary settlements are. Their population is from forty or fifty

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<sup>167</sup> Average crew size, if that could be estimated at all, was: two people in charge, rudder man, cook and trackers (six - ten), Akira: 232.

<sup>168</sup> Akira: 235-237.

<sup>169</sup> Bird: 149.

to over 400 men. When the river rises the huts are removed, and the coolies return to other avocations.”<sup>170</sup>

### Secret Society and Employment

For the professional boat pullers, getting work could be much more complicated. Although, in contrast to their employers, they were largely not protected or regulated by a guild, much evidence shows that their labor market was far from free. Typically the employment was tied to a thick web of social relations, in which personal relations built upon family and secret society ties decided if one got a job, and how big the remuneration would be. Eastern Sichuan, and particularly Chongqing, was the terrain of activity of one of China's biggest secret societies, Gelaohui 哥老會 (alternatively called Paoge 袍哥, Gowned Brothers), which built its influence by tying dispersed working class communities into unequal brotherhoods. These usually created clandestine hierarchies, which in return determined the employment and life standards of workers, and most probably influenced the specialization of the profession.<sup>171</sup>

Gelaohui, according to Cai Shaoqing 蔡少卿, expanded in Sichuan in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the veteran returnees of the Hunan Army, which successfully fought against the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864).<sup>172</sup> The society had already penetrated boatmen's communities establishing its local meeting places and bases in the teahouses lining the multiple docks of Eastern Sichuan.<sup>173</sup> It was also active politically, greatly aiding the Revolution of 1911 and acting in Chongqing in public during republican times. These activities are not our concern here; more importantly, I would like to stress the Gowned Brothers role in the labor market of Sichuan.

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<sup>170</sup> Bird: 118.

<sup>171</sup> Some information on the labor relations in the transportation network of Chongqing during the war: Lee Mclsaac. "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men: Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 105, No. 5 (2000): 1641-1655. Joshua Howard also points to the importance of secret societies and kinship groups in hiring practices in wartime Chongqing. Many practices, especially of religious nature, such as blood sacrifices common among the Yangzi boatmen can point to a sinister provenance, yet there is no comprehensive study that would determine whether these were heterogeneous religious rituals or secret society rituals (however superficial such categories may be): Howard: 85-122.

<sup>172</sup> Cai Shaoqing. "On the Origin of the Gelaohui," *Modern China* Vol. 10, No.4 (Oct., 1984): 495-500.

<sup>173</sup> Wang Hongju 王鴻舉. 2004. *Chongqingshi zhi* 重慶志, Vol. 2: *minzuzhi* 民族志, *minsuzhi* 民俗志, *zongjiaozhi* 宗教志, *fulu* 附录. Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe: 194.

Gelaohui presented itself as inheriting the ancient tradition of righteous rebels professing a goal of the restoration of just rule over the empire, usually expressed through the political maxim “fan Qing fu Ming” 反清復明: “overthrowing the Qing and restoring the Ming”.<sup>174</sup> According to *The Bottom of the Ocean* (Haidi 海地), an early twentieth century treaty on Gelaohui language authored by Fu Chongju 傅崇榘 (1875-1917), this secret society represented itself through a selection of historical and mythical heroes, whose lives and deeds epitomized the society’s worldview. Two legendary founders were certainly most important: the Ming rebel Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624-1662) and the famous late Han hero Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223). Both heroes were acclaimed for their loyalty to legitimate rulers (the houses of Ming and Han respectively). Also, the idea of brotherhood portrayed by the society through its initiation rituals replicated the legendary actions of these past figures.<sup>175</sup>

These elements found expression in the society’s argot and the names of its halls (organizational units).<sup>176</sup> How did Gelaohui achieve control over so many boatmen communities? Wang Di stated that “[...] we know [that] lineages, native associations, and professional guilds played an important role in the traditional community, but many marginalized people did not have any establishment to protect their interests, [...] secret society provided them with a necessary alternative.”<sup>177</sup> What we can infer from such accounts is that Gelaohui created small organizational units within the towns and cities of Sichuan. It had a degree of control over the local population, especially by providing lower-class management and redistribution of resources, disconnected with the established channels of power. As it was decentralized to a very high degree, different lodges often engaged in conflict and developed sophisticated ways of resolving them.<sup>178</sup> According to Wang Di, Gelaohui were controlling communal conflict connecting various parts of provincial

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<sup>174</sup> Wang, 2008: 82.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid: 81-82.

<sup>176</sup> The names of halls or associations, called *gongkou* 公口 or *matou* 碼頭, were: Benevolence 仁, Justice 義, Ritual 禮, Wisdom 智, Truth 信. Vast majority belonged to the former two; the latter three had only one hall each. *Chongqingshi zhi*: 194-195. According to Wang Di the meaning of *gongkou* and *matou* (“harbor”) was “place of entrance and exit for all members.” Wang, 2008: 83.

<sup>177</sup> Wang, 2008: 87.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid: 90-95.

and urban society, but, at the same time challenging the structure of government, co-provincial, or lineage associations.<sup>179</sup>

It is very difficult to determine whether secret society hierarchy converged with the division between guild-members/employers and wage earners. This question will need to be left unanswered. We also do not know if for the whole nineteenth and early twentieth century Gowned Brothers were the only organization or whether it was connected to some smaller secret associations. We are quite sure, however, that Gelaohui created an alternative hierarchy, which had its nodal points in the docks of river cities and spanned broad groups of workers, irrespective of their profession. We also know that, especially during the Republic, it was very prominent in many trades, especially those deemed criminal (such as opium smuggling).<sup>180</sup> Here, it is more important for us to underline that boatmen acted in the reality of a labor market, in which their jobs depended on personal contact and belonging to various, though not always voluntary, associations based on family, lineage, guild and secret society.

### Conditions of River Work and Remuneration

It is not necessary to dwell here on the geographical features of both rivers or on the natural beauty of the Gorges, which throughout the ages have been appreciated by Chinese poets and later by Western travelers.<sup>181</sup> Instead, we will focus here on the rather unsung efforts and work conditions suffered in the struggle to overcome the challenge posed by these natural marvels. Both the Yangzi and the Jialing were extremely difficult to navigate, and there was a strong preference for undertaking journeys in the winter season, when the water-level was low. Both rivers also had fast currents, rocky beds, numerous rapids and

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<sup>179</sup> Wang, 2002: 546-552.

<sup>180</sup> The main recruitment and meeting centers were ex. in Chongqing docks. Interestingly, Gelaohui vocabulary was built upon river metaphors. *Sichuan yuebao*, Vol. 8, No.5 (May) 1936: 235-239. It has to be underlined that especially in Republican China, Gelaohui turned to various criminal activities, such as smuggling and extortion: *ibid*: 321-353

<sup>181</sup> To mention the most famous: Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (466/472-527), “*Shui jingzhu*” 水經註 Yuan Shansong 袁山松 (lived during Eastern Jin 東晉, 317-420), “*Yidu shanchuanji*” 宜都山川記 or Li Bai 李白 (701-762) “*Zaofa baidicheng*” 早發白帝城. A rich depository of poetic depictions of the Gorges can be found in 18<sup>th</sup> century bamboo branch poetry (*zhuzhici*): Lan Yong, Huang Quansheng: 186-189.

sharp bends.<sup>182</sup> An additional difficulty was provided by a lack of space for trackers to move freely. Henry George Woodhead observed that:

[All] along the route [from Yichang to Chongqing] one could see the tow-path. Sometimes it was close to the water level; at others, hundreds of feet up the side of a cliff. At some points it consisted of a banked up path, with steps cut into the rock where it rose, and primitive bridges over the smaller gaps.<sup>183</sup>

Large parts, however lacked paths and many trackers spent most of their work-time in hauling boats half-submerged in the water. These conditions led to specialization: some trackers negotiated narrow tracks cut in the stone shores of the river or flat muddy riverbeds; others stayed constantly in the water and dealt with ropes that got stuck or were caught by the rocks. Yet another group of workers was responsible for pushing the boat off the shore or off dangerous formations in the river bed, using a huge oar made of a tree trunk. Archibald Little described it in the following manner:

[...] a dozen or twenty men left on board to pole, and fend the boat off the boulders and rocky points as she scrapes along, and also to work the gigantic bow sweep formed of a young fir-tree. Another half dozen of the crew are told off to kip over the rocks like cats, and free the tow-line the rocky corners in which it is perpetually catching; besides a staff of three or four special swimmers called "tai-wan-ti" or water trackers, who run along, naked as Adam before the fall, and may be seen squatting on the haunches on rocks ahead, like so many big vultures, prepared to jump into the water at a moment's notice and free the tow-line, should it catch on a rock inaccessible from the shore. These tow-lines are made of strips of bamboo plaited into a cable as thick as the arm, and which requires great skill in coiling and uncoiling, which is incessantly being done, as the necessities of the route require a longer or shorter line.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Past tense is especially suited since after finishing the construction of the dam in Yichang, none of the geographical features are any longer visible or extant.

<sup>183</sup> Woodhead: 30.

<sup>184</sup> Little: 111.

Most of the trackers worked naked or at best very scantily dressed, and were thus in no way protected from the harsh winter weather or cold water. In the early 1930s Woodhead described their look and labor as:

[...] if anyone wanted to devise an intolerable form of hard-labor he might well select this. Wholly naked, or at best half-clothed, harnessed to loops in the long bamboo rope, these men were straining every muscle of their bodies to move their craft onward. Several of them were bent double, others were literally crawling on their hands and knees over the boulder-strewn foreshore.<sup>185</sup>

The physical strain associated with the work was rendered even more difficult by exposure to climatic conditions and the lack of any possibility to rest during the working day. For these reasons their labor was claimed to be the harshest and lowest among all China's professions.

Yet such a general description misses the essence of the diversity of work performed and consequent social position and culture. Isabella Bird, while travelling to Sichuan at the end of nineteenth century, observed two divergent groups of trackers. There were those who were professional, in the sense that they were part of the boat crew and performed their work throughout the whole cruise; the others were hired laborers on the more difficult passages, whether on the rapids or narrow difficult bends of the river. The first group she held in quite high esteem, claiming that "The trackers may be the roughest class in China – but nevertheless they are good-natured in their ways; free on the whole from crimes of violence, full of fun, antics, and frolic; clever at taking off foreigners; loving a joke, and with a keen sense of humour."<sup>186</sup> In contact with these people it was their roughness that provided the first shock – either their hygiene habits, looks, clothing or religious practices (always named "superstitions"). The seasonal river workers did not gain an equally good opinion. Bird saw them dwelling in the river-side shanty towns "mat camps [...] very boisterous at night"<sup>187</sup> where: "more than 1200 trackers, men and boys, notoriously the roughest class in China, were living in mat huts on the hillside, with all their foul and oftentimes vicious accessories."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Woodhead: 30.

<sup>186</sup> Bird: 148-149.

<sup>187</sup> Bird: 149.

<sup>188</sup> Bird: 123. A detailed description of life, as well as meager services and pleasures available in such camps: Bird: 118.

Lack of morality, as it was understood by a Victorian lady, as well as dirt and poverty left a rather fearful impression.

Yet one thing never escaped observers, the work ethic and impeccable obedience to superiors, especially in situations of danger.<sup>189</sup> On professional trackers' work ethics Archibald Little marveled at their seriousness and perfection in every duty they had to undertake. He also did not refrain from commenting on their character: "grave men, with a cheerful smile, pleasant voice and quiet manner when giving orders, which were obeyed by the crew with alacrity and silence that formed a great contrast to the frightful noise and confusion with which any manoeuvre is carried out in China generally, on board boats or elsewhere."<sup>190</sup>

Professional trackers who earned their life mostly from boat pulling differed from those who took it up only seasonally. The former had, at least in the eyes of foreign observers, some air of respectability, the latter generally not. They were mostly peasants unemployed during the slack season, who used to flock to the river banks in places of exceptional danger and offer their services to passing boats.

## **Wages**

We can better understand the differences in social standing by looking at the forms of remuneration. The trackers, men who pulled the boats upriver and often worked as oarsmen as well were considered the lowest among all working classes. Their labor required an enormous and unceasing investment of physical force, in difficult and often crippling conditions, for meager remuneration.<sup>191</sup> As calculated by interested Japanese merchants in 1897, the approximate wage of a river worker (sailor working on the deck) on the way up to Chongqing was two tael and three strings of cash (*er liang san qian* 二兩三錢); trackers received only two taels.<sup>192</sup> The temporary workers employed on the rapids and difficult

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<sup>189</sup> Bird: 114-137.

<sup>190</sup> Little: 78-79.

<sup>191</sup> According to Archibald Little, they worked on average 12 to 13 hours per day, see: Little: 124-125.

<sup>192</sup> Tael (*liang*) was a silver denomination, cash was a copper denomination (*qian*, *wen*). We do not know whether trackers were paid in silver or in bronze coins and to what extent they were affected by changing exchange rates. It is also impossible to determine the exchange rate between silver and bronze coins in the mentioned period. We know that around 1855 the tael price in Chongqing was 3200/3300 cash, but in following decades silver fluctuated, first rising and then plummeting, at least in the economic centers of China. Endymion Porter Wilkinson. 1980 (1970). *Studies in Chinese Price History*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.: 12-20, 32-36.



stretches of the rivers were paid around eight cash (*bawen* 八文) per day. Comparatively, on journeys down river workers basically made a loss. Their remuneration consisted, apart from meals, of one-tenth to six-tenths of a tael.<sup>193</sup> It is hard to understand the size of these wages without comparison and that is rendered exceedingly difficult in the particularly messy market currency market of Sichuan.<sup>194</sup> If we assume that their comparative purchasing power did not change from the beginning of the century till 1921, we can clearly see that there was no possibility of advancing from worker to petty entrepreneur owning a boat. That at least is visible from the 1906 Japanese Consular Report from Hankou, which approximated trackers' wages to between one and two strings of cash per month, while helmsmen were on four to five strings (with meals paid by the boat-owner).<sup>195</sup> In comparison, building a boat was an investment of 800 strings of cash, which was usually undertaken as a joint-venture of the captain, his friends and family and paid back within two to four years from commissioning. A boat had a life-span of twenty years, but if over-exploited did not last more than ten.<sup>196</sup> Such financial capabilities were well outside the reach of any river worker, who could not save much from his meager wages. From this comparison we can also see the socio-economic distance that divided workers from their employers. Although compared to opulent city merchants, a boat captain was just a petty businessman, to his laborers he was a man of extensive power and wealth.

### **River Workers in the City**

Having a fairly clear notion of the conditions of boatmen on the rivers of Eastern Sichuan, we should now turn to the cities. As we know, the influence of industrialization was very limited in Chongqing and Eastern Sichuan. Although factories (with a limited level of mechanization) were opened from the "Opening" in 1890, and under the industrial policy of Liu Xiang 劉湘 (1926-1937), no investment was made in improving river ferry services. Since the three main districts of the metropolis, Chongqing, Jiangbei and Nan'an 南岸 (industrial district, Japanese concession and foreign settlement) were not linked by a bridge, a reliable ferry service was

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<sup>193</sup> Akira: 239.

<sup>194</sup> Chongqing market in 1933 used diverse currencies that circulated in China from the establishment of the Republic: Yuan Shikai yuan, Sun Zhongshan yuan, Beiyang yuan, Sichuan yuan, the so-called Japanese yuan, etc. *Chongqing lüxing zhinan*: 38. According to Woodhead, the Sichuan currency market was in a state of permanent chaos, Woodhead: 66-67.

<sup>195</sup> Akira: 222.

<sup>196</sup> Akira: 223.

indispensable.<sup>197</sup> Ferries also connected bigger boats and steamers with the city. For these reasons almost every traveler had direct experience of their service.<sup>198</sup>

Lack of investment in infrastructure inevitably led to reliance on human-propelled means of transportation. In the context of Chongqing and other Yangzi cities it translated itself into unceasing dependence on row-boat ferries, called *huachuan* 划船. Ferryman caused considerably more unease and distrust than other workers and were accused of being messy, noisy and a bunch of cheaters. Du Ruozhi 杜若之, author of the 1938 guide to Chongqing, wrote:

As it is when approaching Shanghai, Hankou and other ports of these parts, before the boat even drops the anchor, runners receiving guests from hotels, luggage carriers, boatmen (*huafu* 划夫), and other people of every kind, already having climbed the deck, struggling to be first, surround every passenger, raising a hue and cry; because of this darkest earth shaking chaos, one does not want to mingle with them [...].<sup>199</sup>

The image of anarchy, which left a strong imprint on the minds of most first time visitors, stood in stark contrast to the organizational practices of the ferry business. The same author described the existence of specialized groups that labored in the docks and landing stations, and had their own specialization, dealing with ferried goods or groups of people.<sup>200</sup> Apparently, the way things worked was far from obvious to visitors and received unceasing attention from travelers and guide writers.<sup>201</sup> It appears that till the wartime the profession was not organized according to any regulations, and specialized guilds of ferrymen were given a free reign. The skill of the rowers in navigating complex river currents, and frequent doubts about the condition of vessels determined the status of the profession. In 1938,

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<sup>197</sup> Lu Sihong: 13. Woodhead: 52-53.

<sup>198</sup> Lu Sihong: 127-131.

<sup>199</sup> *Lüyü xiangdao*: 9.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*: 10-12.

<sup>201</sup> Basil wrote a whole story about ferrymen, who were important parts of his Chongqing experience, claiming they were sometimes cheaters but sometimes very helpful people. Basil: 151-154, 234-236.

certain safety provisions were introduced, limiting the number of people shipped and type of boats, yet it seems, practice did not follow the regulators' intentions.<sup>202</sup>

### Transportation Guilds in Chongqing

Ferrying passengers was regulated by guild associations, which set standards, working hours and wages for employed workers. According to a 1933 *Travel Guide to Chongqing* they were minutely organized within specialized guilds, each corresponding to a particular route – from a dock in one part of the city to a dock in another.<sup>203</sup> Quoting a 1921 report, Akira outlined five such routes crossing the Jialing and three crossing the Yangzi. He also explained: “From the shores of Chongqing crossing the Jialing to nearby villages is also quite developed (*fada* 發達). It is more or less convenient. But all the ferries are small native boats, so called *huazi* (劃子). Therefore, not only are they risky during the flood season, but also big waves can break them. There is however no alternative.”<sup>204</sup>

Guilds, especially those in Chongqing, came under sharp criticism in the People's Republic of China for their perceived role as associations of employers designed to exploit the workers. With rather limited information on each of these organizations, we have to rely on the example of only one guild – chair carriers – and it is debatable whether such practices were common in other trades. However, the overall tone of the description in *Historical Materials from Sichuan Province (Sichuan wenshi ziliao)*, indicates that the following observations can be generalized.

Guilds blossomed during the Open Port period and new business encouraged efforts to monopolize the local market by a few powerful actors. At the same time, monopolization allowed for the financial exploitation of waged workers, who were dependent on a small number of employers, who were also owners of the labor tools. The owners were able to make workers “buy themselves in” (賣輪子 *mailunzi*), “buy security” (掛牌子 *guapaizi*), or “pay the guild” (幫差費 *bangchafei*). Other payments were connected with running the guild

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<sup>202</sup> *Lüyu xiangdao*: 12.

<sup>203</sup> *Chongqing lüxing zhinan*: 18.

<sup>204</sup> “自重慶沿江之地橫渡長江或嘉陵江之附近村落的渡船也比較發達。大致無不便之感。但渡船皆為小型民船—劃子，故不僅在豐水期渡船航行要冒很大風險，而且風大浪高時，渡船一絕迹于江面，亦是不得已也” Akira: 131-132.

and its existing hierarchies, such as “registration” or “head-money” (收上帳 *shoushangzhang* or 抽頭錢 *choutouqian*), “celebration fee” (分喜錢 *fenxiqian*), “place fee” (收店錢 *shoudianqian*), or “opening opium den fee” (開煙館 *kaiyanguan*).<sup>205</sup> This picture, though quite extreme, certainly indicates a large field of malpractice on the side of employers. It also draws our attention to the power relations existing within the cities, where company owners, and powerful guild members, often being secret society bosses could exploit vulnerable labor.

Even though many guilds were organized and used for profit by city entrepreneurs, from the evidence presented by Golas, it seems that most of them were rather small organizations, which focused on performing rituals and limiting competition within the profession. It seems as well, that the conditions of the guild members were on average better than those of workers who had to compete in a relatively free market, as in case of trackers. This relative, though expensive, security of employment granted by guilds protected members from social degradation. Outside formalized guilds comparable security was sought or even imposed on workers by secret societies and fraternities. Evidence of such practices abound from the World War II period, yet were surely not unknown in previous decades.<sup>206</sup>

As we have seen, there was a substantial degree of similarity between the boatmen working on long distances and those ferrying people across rivers. Their lowly social and economic status, high mobility, existence on the fringes of urban, sub-urban, and rural worlds, as well as absence of or subordination to guilds and other associations all provide evidence of strong similarities. Additionally, there is more evidence for than against the hypothesis that workers in the water transportation sector moved between professions if pressed by life necessities. Having physical durability and strength as their only capital, they constituted a cheap source of labor for a variety of employers. We have seen an example of such profession-switching in the travel accounts of Isabella Bird in the Yangzi Gorges. It is thus even more conceivable that it existed in the mobile urban environment of Chongqing and other cities.

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<sup>205</sup> *Sichuan wenshiziliao jicui*, Vol. 6: 316-331.

<sup>206</sup> McIsaac, 2000: 1641-1655.

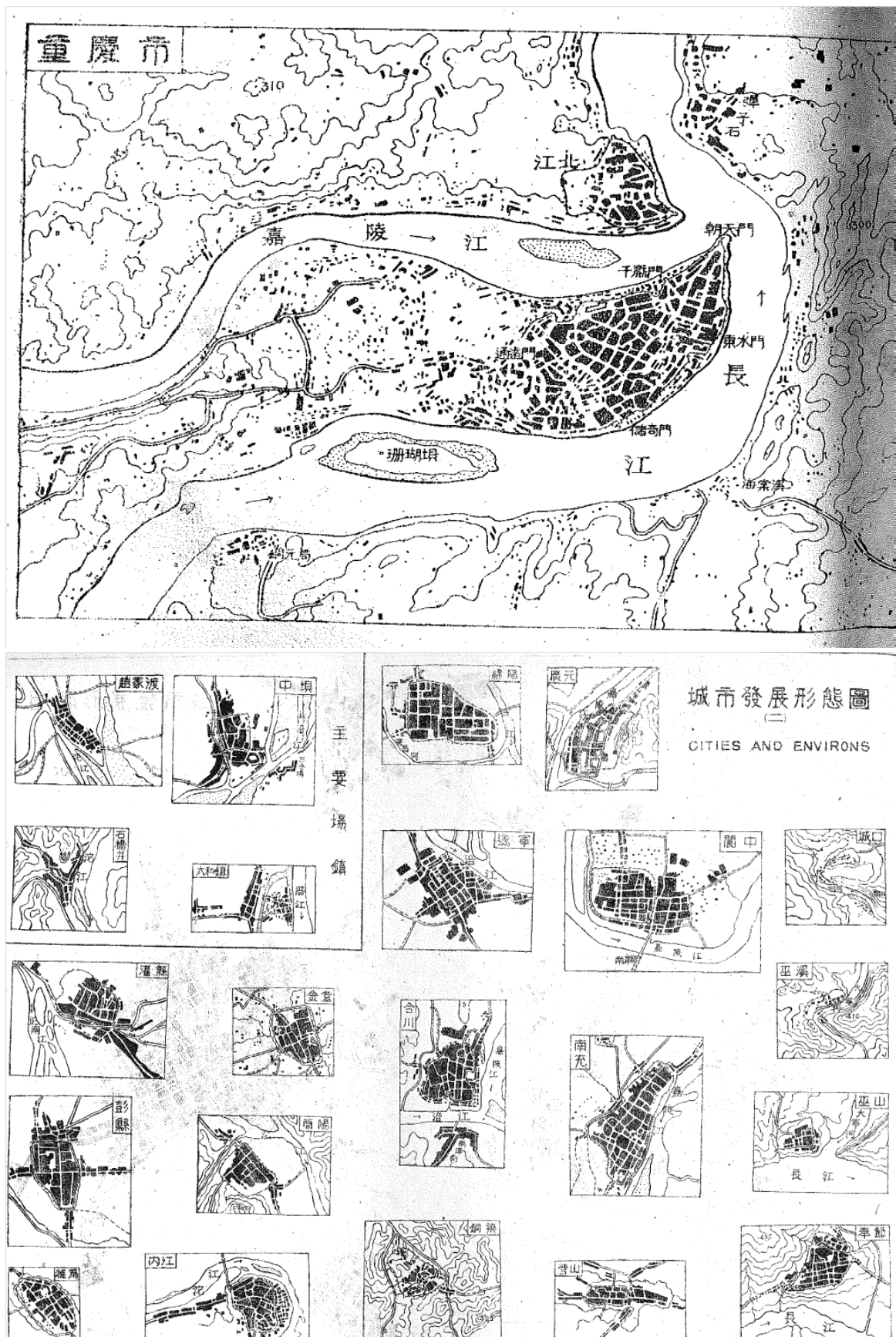


Figure 4: Plan of Chongqing and other major towns in Sichuan; note the rivers; source: *Sichuan jingji ditu*: no page nr.

## Urban Life of the Boatmen

Analyzing the data on the river workers of Eastern Sichuan, we have examined all angles of their professional characteristics, and now turn to some important elements of the cultural and material milieu in which they existed. Firstly Eastern Sichuan boatmen existed within a world that was typically defined not by place of residence, but by the rivers particular groups worked upon. Such a division was valid for one fundamental, already mentioned reason: guild and particular company (boat) specialization in traffic on familiar routes. Each route, however, was not a deserted land, but a chain of cities, towns, hamlets and camps, which provided stations on the boat's route. Boatmen, thus constituted a permanently migrant and yet somewhat urban population in Eastern Sichuan. But their urbanity was conditional and defined by the places they lived in, parts of the towns they occupied, time they spent in each place, and type of housing available to them. These elements had an impact on their language, habits and, more generally, culture they inhabited and represented.

As inhabitants of the cities, boatmen were confined to particular spaces, which corresponded to their lowly status and to their migratory lifestyles. These were mostly associated with the docks and dock-lands, which surrounded the city wall of almost any town in the province. Such places provided an intermediate space between the organized urban environment, delineated by the city walls and the river, which was exploited for economic reasons, but not used for housing.<sup>207</sup> Yet we have some descriptions of these spaces coming from travelers to Eastern Sichuan and Chongqing. Looking at the Little River (Jialing) George Basil saw: "[a] mass of ramshackle shelters in which so many of Chunking's poor and outcast manage existence [...]." <sup>208</sup> While the river was filled with people who worked and lived there:

On the surface of the river floated countless craft down from inland towns. The boatmen, furling sales or poling a watery path between wedged traffic, punctuated river chants by hurling good-natured curses at all in their way. Unheeding, their families went about the business of normal living aboard, feeding fowls, collecting

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<sup>207</sup> 1939 Ba County Gazetteer does not list these outward settlements as either wards (*fang* 坊) or districts (*qu* 區). *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 219-228.

<sup>208</sup> Basil: 222.

dried laundry from bamboo poles, or tending the small charcoal fires under cook-pots.<sup>209</sup>

Shu Xincheng 舒心城, author of *Shuyou xinying* 蜀游心影 [*Impressions from Travel to Sichuan*] expressed a more analytical view on these makeshift and boat settlements that overgrew the river banks of every town of Eastern Sichuan. He pointed to the mixed population of such places, where petty tradesmen mixed with peasants and boatmen. He also deplored the very low level of amenities, crowding, and discomfort of such places. The biggest scourge, however, was the need to remove houses as soon as flood season started, because of the danger of having one's property swept away by high waters.<sup>210</sup> Shu Xincheng claimed that: "This type of migratory (herd-men like) city construction, is said to be in every part of the Sichuan river-land [...]."<sup>211</sup>

These constructions were named 'hanging feet houses' (so called *diaojiaolou* 吊脚樓), a name which designated a stilt house. They were mainly seasonal buildings on stilts attached to steep riverbanks and city walls. The structure of urban spaces was also significant, usually following the geomorphologic formations of the river valleys.<sup>212</sup> The proximity of such housing to the river and the physical intermingling of river space and urban space produced a permanently migratory and 'amphibious' society, which differed in its lifestyle from settled, inner city communities.

Although descriptions of such forms of urbanization are rather scarce, we can observe it in the photographs of Fritz Weiss. Two of them are particularly interesting: one depicting a

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid: op.cit.

<sup>210</sup> *Shuyou xinying*: 33-34.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid: 34.

<sup>212</sup> There are many publications on the subject. On Sichuan housing conditions see: Li Xiankui 李先逵. 2010. *Sichuan minju* 四川民居. Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe. Sichuansheng jianshe weiyuanhui; Sichuansheng kancha shejie xiehui; Sichuansheng tumujianzhu xuehui 四川省建設委員會; 四川省勘查設計協會; 四川省土木建築學會. 2004. *Sichuan minju* 四川民居. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe. Wang Qijun 王其鈞. 2000. *Laofangzi. Sichuan minju*. 老房子. 四川民居. Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe. On Chongqing, see: Zheng Jingdong 鄭敬東, Zhu Peilin 朱培麟 and Fu Zhou 傅舟. 2005. *Changjiang Sanxia jiaotong wenhua* 長江三峽交通文化. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe: 191-195. Wang Chuanping 王川平. 2007. *Lao fangzi* 老房子. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe.

dock area near Qiansimen 千斯門 (Thousand Servants Gate in Chongqing; figure 5); the other showing the shores either of Chongqing or of Wanxian (figure 6).<sup>213</sup>



Figure 5: Various types of boats moored in Chongqing river port. The picture clearly depicts the proximity and interconnection between the social and physical spaces of the boatmen and dockland populations. Picture: Fritz Weiss. Tamara Wyss: 66.

<sup>213</sup> In the album of Tamara Wyss, this picture is said to depict Wanxian 萬縣. It has been speculated that it may actually show Chongqing (see: Dai Yuhua 戴渝華. 2007. *Lao matou* 老碼頭. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe: 18 ). Irrespective of the location, the picture gives a unique view of the multilayered urbanization in Eastern Sichuan. It consisted of boats, which also served as houses, make-shift stilt houses between riverbanks and city walls, and permanent urban settlement inside the walled city.





Figure 6: River shore of Wanxian or Chongqing; Picture: Fritz Weiss. Wyss: 49.

What is clear from Weiss's depictions of river-urban space is a blurring of borders (which were more administrative than human) and existence of a sub-urban culture that belonged both to boatmen and other varied social groups. The physical space boatmen occupied also defined their social interactions, which were bound to an extensive degree to the underclass of Eastern Sichuan cities.

Although a limited group of trackers were farm laborers tracking on seasonal basis, most stayed within the hybrid urban environment of the destitute suburbs and floating boat towns. Even those who were professional boatmen were not totally cut off from the rural world, as they rubbed shoulders with freshly arriving peasants or urban peasants with whom they shared living spaces. Existing within cities and yet staying on their fringes defined the cultural milieu of the Sichuan boatmen. The life of boatmen, however, differed starkly from that of peasants: they travelled extensively and thus they saw the world outside the village and the local market. They part took in urban entertainment, obviously within their financial

means, such as brothels, teahouses, temple fairs and makeshift opera houses. They had an acute sense of the market economy and knew the value of money well, as they relied on wage labor. They were also dependent on and partook of the modes of social organization unique to Sichuan's urban life (or underworld), such as the Gowned Brother's lodges and teahouses.

Material and social similarity to other urban workers places boatmen within the urban world. Yet we should always bear in mind that such designation is tenuous. Boatmen were always men on the fringes of the cities, both physically and socially. As an urban dweller, to observe them one had to look down to the river; and while looking down one mostly looked down on the boatmen.

## **Conclusion**

Sichuan boatmen were the children of the trade revolution which reshaped Western China from the beginning of the Qing dynasty. Growing in number and sophistication of technique throughout the nineteenth century they became an indispensable element, an engine of trade that enriched the cities of Sichuan, and above all, Chongqing. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century boatmen structured and performed their work without implementing many of the technological or organizational innovations of the epoch. Sichuan boats were sophisticated in their adjustment to local conditions, but entirely dependent on natural (wind or river current) or human motor force. They were constructed from wood and managed with wooden tools. This reliance on traditional technology demanded a minute division of labor and people of special skills to perform it: helmsmen, pilots, rowers, trackers etc., in one word boatmen. They were employed in small enterprises, probably through secret society middle men. These companies were grouped in guilds specialized in exploiting particular river routes. Thus most boatmen spent their time moving back and forth on the same routes.

Due to meager remuneration and low class origins most boatmen were undereducated or illiterate and certainly very poor. We cannot ascertain how long the working life of such people was, but since it demanded physical strength, they surely could not perform at an advanced age. Because of the nature of their work and places where they lived boatmen

should be counted among the urban population, but their urban character was tentative and highly reflective of the mixed and only partially industrialized economy of Sichuan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.



# CHAPTER 2: CHINESE FOLKLORE RESEARCH: EMERGENCE OF FORMS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

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As the socio-economic analysis provided in the previous pages has allowed us to contextualize Eastern Sichuan boatmen within the historical developments of the region, this chapter will be a methodological discussion of our main sources – ethnographic collections of the boatmen’s work songs. Without understating the intellectual, ideological and political context of the ‘production’ of these sources, any further discussion and analysis of genres, motifs, and readings would appear baseless.

This chapter, after outlining the history of Chinese folklore studies, will focus on the categories which were developed within twentieth century scholarship to classify folk songs, and which still hold sway in the understanding of popular culture. Although both the theory and field work already developed during the Republic related to cities central to both Chinese culture and interaction with Western thought, (especially Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou) they were by no means alien to Chongqing and Sichuan. Later, I will show how folklore researchers, after reemerging from Maoist propaganda , were productive in the creation of a sophisticated system of categorization and in gathering material later compiled into massive anthologies. Firstly, I will pay close attention to the controversies they raised while defining work songs (*haozi*) and value of their categories for historical research. Secondly, I will analyze the particular projects (already extensively covered by Chinese and Western scholars), which constitute the source base for this thesis.

## **Folklore, New Ideologies and Development of Humanistic Sciences**

### **An Overview**

In the early twentieth century, almost all important Chinese intellectuals showed an interest in investigating folklore. Their ambition was to utilize it as a means for reforming post-Qing Chinese culture. Gathering and researching folk songs was seen as an exercise in reviving the

language, closing the artificial gap created by the old imperial elites and bringing culture and power back to the Chinese people.

This task, nationalist and revolutionary at the same time was taken up by most of the prominent young intellectual-activists of the May Fourth Movement (1919): Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942), Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887-1939), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), Liu Fu 劉復 (1891-1934) *et al.* The Beijing National University (國立北京大學 Guoli Beijing daxue; or Beida) – a center for early republican cultural radicalism and for adaptation, experimentation and merging of classical and western ideas in humanist studies – provided the early environment for folklore research. Within the university scholars formed, among other shorter-lived organizations, the Folk-song Research Society (歌謠研究會, Geyao yanjiuhui, 1918) and in 1923 the Custom Survey Society (風俗調查表, Fengsu diaochabiao).<sup>214</sup> The first association provided a framework for conducting collection, research and publishing work, while providing at the same time a basis for the growth of other, more specialized activities in the field of folklore. Its activities in the field of folklore investigation and analysis were published in a specialized journal entitled *Folk-song Weekly* (歌謠週刊, Geyao zhoukan).<sup>215</sup> The Custom Survey Society engaged in preparation of a comprehensive investigation of Chinese traditional society. Their program included: “collection of written sources; inquiry by questionnaire; collection of museum objects.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Other organizations included: Folk-song Collection Bureau (歌謠徵集處, Geyao zhengjichu), 1918; Institute of Sinology (研究所國學門, Yanjiusuo guoxuemen), 1922; Folk-song Research Bureau (歌謠研究室, Geyao yanjiushi), 1922. Chao Wei-pang. “Modern Chinese Folklore Investigation. Part I. The Peking National University,” *Folklore Studies*, Vol. 1 (1942): 55-68.

<sup>215</sup> Research was also published in *University Daily* (北大日刊, Beida Rikan). Ibid: 55. In 1925-26, there appeared new short-run journals: *The Weekly Review of the Institute of Sinology of the Peking National University* (國立北京大學研究所國學門週刊, Guoli Beijing daxue yanjiusuo guoxuemen zhoukan) and *The Journal of the Institute of Sinology of the Peking National University* (國立北京大學研究所國學門月刊, Guoli Beijing daxue yanjiusuo guoxuemen yuekan). Ibid: 60.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid: 65. In 1936 Beida again briefly became a center of ethnographic studies under the supervision of Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren, Luo Changpei 羅常培, Wei Jiangong 魏建功, Gu Jiegang, etc. Luo Changpei (1899-1958) was a linguist esp. of historical Chinese phonology. Worked in Beida, Institute of History and Philology etc.; director of the Research Institute of Linguistics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (till 1950-1958). Wei Jiangong (1901-1980) was a linguist; worked at Chinese-French University (Zhongfa daxue 中法大學), Keijō Imperial University, Seoul (Chinese name: Riben jingcheng diguo daxue, 日本京城帝國大學), Beijing University and

The results of surveys were rather unsatisfactory (only 41 respondents from a total of 3000 questionnaires sent out) and though many of them were published, the society was soon dissolved.<sup>217</sup>

With growing instability in the early 1920s and the rise of the Nationalist Party as the main political actor in China, the center of academic activity and of folklore interest shifted south. With new academics joining their ranks, Beijing professors migrated to the southern province of Fujian 福建 and later to Guangzhou 廣州 in order to promote their academic and political agendas. One of the first folklore associations south of the Yangzi was established in 1924 by Chen Xixiang 陳錫襄 (1898-1975) and was called the Fujian Study Society (閩學會, Min xuehui). Like many of the previously described initiatives, this one was equally short-lived.

In 1926, Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976), Shen Jianshi 沈兼士 (1887?-1947), Zhou Shuren 周樹人 (better known as Lü Xun 魯迅 1881-1936), Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), and Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖 (1897-1995), all ex-professors from Beida formed a Sinological Research Institute (國學研究院 Guoxue yanjiu yuan) in Xiamen University (also short-lived).<sup>218</sup> From the establishment of the Nationalist Party capital in Guangzhou, this city became one of the main centers of folklore studies. Investigation recommenced within the academic and political environment of the National Sun Yat-sen University of Guangzhou (廣州國立中山大學, Guangzhou guoli zhongshan daxue), which housed the newly established Institute of

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National Southwestern Associated University, Kunming 昆明 (Guoli xinan lianhe daxue 國立西南聯合大學); after 1949 on Taiwan.

<sup>217</sup> For a full translated text of the questionnaire, see: *ibid*: 65-68. On early Chinese social surveys, see: Tong Lam. 2011.

<sup>218</sup> Lin Yutang was a Christian, educated in Leipzig, a writer, translator and compiler. Qian Suoqiao. 2010. *Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity*. Leiden: Brill. Shen Jianshi was a linguist and archivist, worked at Beijing University, Qinghua University and Xiamen University; director of the National Palace Museum Ming-Qing Archive. Rong Zhaozu was a historian. Gu Jiegang worked at Xiamen University, Zhongshan University (Guangzhou), Yanjing University (Beijing), Zhongyang University, Fudan University (Shanghai), Lanzhou University and Cheloo University (Jin'an, Shandong); on Gu see: Chang-tai Hung. 1985. *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Q. Edward Wang. 2001. *Inventing China Through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Philology and History (語言歷史研究所, Yüyan lishi yanjiusuo). Its first director was professor Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1906-1950) and from 1928 this function was taken by Gu Jiegang. The Institute of Philology and History was the main academic institution for ethnographic, anthropological, historical and archeological research on mainland China till the communist takeover in 1949.

### **Ideology and Achievements**

As was mentioned above, the aims of this early research were more connected with the need to reshape contemporary elite culture than with the call for reform of popular culture, or the purely academic task of collection and research. Yet, with time, new ideas, subjects and analytical frameworks were employed, turning Chinese folklore investigation into a very diverse scientific enterprise. By the mid-1930s we can see that specialized branches of humanistic science, such as ethnography, anthropology, archeology, philology and history were all developing and affecting scholars' understanding of both the past and of the non-elite members of the society.

In fact the ambition (perceived as a burning need) was to promote popular language and revive allegedly moribund Chinese literature.<sup>219</sup> Research into songs was seen as fundamental to this task and the historical evidence seemed to justify their view. Just as the language of the past derived from the folk tunes of the Zhou 周, Tang 唐 and Song 宋, future Chinese would be inspired by current folk songs. The language folklorists promoted was a so-called vernacular *baihua* 白話 – an ambitious undertaking, which in the eyes of intellectuals was intended to stir up a social, political and cultural redefinition of China.<sup>220</sup> Hu Shi claimed that:

First, it was a conscious movement to promote a new literature in the living language of the people to take the place of the classical literature of old. Second, it was a movement of conscious protest against many of the ideas and institutions in the traditional culture, and of conscious emancipation of the individual man and woman

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<sup>219</sup> "They [New Culture intellectuals] felt that the Chinese classical language was dead, incapable of expressing the living thoughts and feelings of the people." Chao, 1942: 56.

<sup>220</sup> Robert Culp. "Teaching *Baihua*: Textbook Publishing and the Production of Vernacular Language and a New Literary Canon in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Twentieth-Century China*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (November, 2008): 4-41.



from the bondage of the forces of tradition. It was a movement of reason versus tradition, freedom versus authority, and glorification of life and human values versus their suppression. And lastly, strange enough, this new movement was led by men who knew their cultural heritage and tried to study it with the methodology of modern historical criticism and research. In that sense it was also a humanist movement.<sup>221</sup>

Following this deeply nationalist agenda, folksongs were to be studied also for technical analysis, selection and limited publishing in the so-called *The People's Voice* (300 exemplary songs were proposed but the project was not carried through), while new literature was to be produced within the spirit of humanism and freedom.<sup>222</sup> Hu Shi claimed that between the 1910s and 1930s the aims of folklore research did not change.<sup>223</sup> The first period of research, however, was more fruitful in the area of social studies based on songs than in production of a new national literature.<sup>224</sup>

One of the most innovative scholars of the Beijing period was Zhou Zuoren. As the head of the Folksong Research Society, Zhou Zuoren presided over the expansion and changing course of the research.<sup>225</sup> From Issue no. 50 of *Folk-song Weekly*, the published articles touching on such issues as temples, local customs, traditions and rituals, as well as detailed analyses of particular oral traditions.<sup>226</sup> The greater scope of this work also brought deeper engagement in defining genres of folk traditions as well as efforts to uncover the sources of traditional mentality. According to Chang Jun 常峻, the early period of Zhou's work was devoted to defining typically Chinese genres of popular traditions by comparing native songs and stories with those identified and classified by European folklorists. He claimed that children's stories, legends, fairy tales, epic etc. all represented the (原始人, *yuanshiren*)

<sup>221</sup> Hu Shih, *The Chinese Renaissance*. Chicago: 44. Quoted and translated by: Chao, 1942: 56.

<sup>222</sup> Chao, 1942: 56.

<sup>223</sup> "There are two sources of models for the new Chinese poetry: one is found in foreign literature, and the other in our popular songs. [...] Most of those who write new poems may be said to depend merely on their genius, searching out their way in darkness. [...] The new poets may take [popular songs] as models," *Folk-song Weekly*, Vol. II, No. 1; April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1936; quoted by Chao, 1942: 57-58.

<sup>224</sup> Chao, 1942: 63.

<sup>225</sup> Such as the myth of Meng Jiangnü 孟姜女, Chao, 1942: 68.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid: 70.

philosophy, science and religion of “primitive men”.<sup>227</sup> To take his point further, Zhou wrote two articles, one in the December, 1923 issue of *Folk-song Weekly* entitled “Obscene Folk Songs” and another in the October, 1925 issue under the title “Expounding the Obscene Folk Songs.”<sup>228</sup> Understanding the relatively more base character of popular traditions Zhou promoted research and publication of “vulgar” songs and proverbs. He claimed they reflected the situations of the common man’s life as well as his language. He also emphasized that vulgarity (especially of a sexual nature, *seqing* 色情) was already a developed and legitimate field in European research. The lack of theoretical discussion on this in China made understanding folk traditions very problematic.<sup>229</sup> Zhou’s other interests included humorous traditions (笑話, *xiaohua*) and traditional creeds, especially beliefs in ghosts.<sup>230</sup> The mid-1920s intellectual and research activity of Zhou Zuoren illuminated the path for the future development of Chinese folklore studies, with its deep linguistic interest, focus on dialects, and ambition to reconstruct historical mentality.<sup>231</sup> At the same time, his endeavors in the field of folklore research were still largely subservient to the task of cultural critique, as well as the creation and refinement of modern Chinese culture.<sup>232</sup>

In the Guangzhou period (from 1926 onwards) folklore research was progressively imbued with the ideas advanced by the Nationalist party. The first issue of the *Weekly Bulletin of the Institute of the Philology and History of the National Sun Yat-sen University* (the main platform for publication and discussion of popular traditions) states:

We want to break into pieces all the idols and reject all the prejudices in the kingdom of knowledge of the past. We want to collect our materials actually – to go to the common people to search for their dialects, to the old cultural ruins to excavate and

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<sup>227</sup> Chang Jun 常峻. 2009. Zhou Zuoren wenxue sixiang ji chuangzuode minsu wenhua shiye 周作人文學思想及創作的民俗文化視野. Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chubanjituan: 100-105.

<sup>228</sup> Zhou Zuoren 周作人. “Weixiede geyao” 猥褻的歌謠歌謠週刊, *Geyao zhoukan*, 1923 年 12 月 17 日 (Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>): 22-24. Zhou Zuoren 周作人. “Zhengqiu weixiede geyao qi” 徵求猥褻的歌謠啟, *Geyao zhoukan*, No. 1925 年 10 月 12 日 (Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>): 8. Also see: Chang Jun: 106.

<sup>229</sup> Zhou Zuoren 周作人. “Weixiede geyao”:22.

<sup>230</sup> Chang Jun: 252-268.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid: 107-112.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid: 244-252.

to the different human societies to make inquiry of their customs – to found new studies.<sup>233</sup>

In contrast to previous initiatives the Guangzhou institute also added to its main areas of focus research into customs, dethroning the previous sole focus on the folksongs.<sup>234</sup> Apart from the already mentioned weekly, a much more specialized publication called *Minsu* 民俗 (*Folk Customs*) was devoted to the purpose of disseminating knowledge of popular Chinese culture. Additionally, much more attention was paid to the task of training future generations of folklorists with comprehensive courses offered to interested students.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, the achievements of the period between 1926 and the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War delimited, in the long run, the major trends in the Chinese academic approach to researching popular culture. Certainly, the scholars who were involved in setting up the research institutes in the National Sun Yat-sen University left their imprint on future generations, irrespective of whether their teachings were endorsed or refuted.

By far the most significant of the activities of the Institute of Philology and History was the intellectual work of Gu Jiegang. From 1928 Gu Jiegang was a director of the institute.<sup>236</sup> Under his supervision the institute was divided into four departments: archeology, philology, history and folklore.<sup>237</sup> In defiance of the standard set by Beida in the first years of the decade, the Guangzhou institute took a narrower yet more thorough agenda, focusing primarily on Guangdong and Guangxi by means of collecting material, studying minorities, and editing abstracts of folk stories etc. In the meantime, the main venue for publishing, the *Weekly Bulletin*, in spite of many achievements, struggled with financial shortages, leading to many interruptions. The one hundred and twenty three issues were published between 1927 and 1930 as well as in the short period between March and July, 1933.

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<sup>233</sup> Editorial of the *Weekly Bulletin of the Institute of the Philology and History of the National Sun Yat-sen University*, no. 1, Nov. 1927. Translation of Chao Wei-peng. Quoted after Chao, 1943: 81.

<sup>234</sup> For example by organizing the first specialist museum in the area of folklore: Show Room of Folklore Objects (風俗物品陳列室, Fengsu wupin chenlieshi). Ibid: 81.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid: 82.

<sup>236</sup> For more about Gu's training, career and his centrality to the development of Chinese twentieth century folklore and historical professions, see: Hung, 1985. On the May 4<sup>th</sup> roots of Chinese historiography, role of Gu Jiegang and his interactions with other intellectuals of the period, see: Q. Edward Wang, 2001.

<sup>237</sup> Chao, 1943: 81-82.

Nevertheless, great strides were made in comparative folklore, identifying cultural motifs, and classifying legends (Gu's main area of expertise). The latter are especially interesting, as they were the first efforts at comprehensive analysis of popular culture, across the geographic and dialectic divisions in China. Gu identified legends relating to historical people (such as Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, 1328-1398; Han Yu 韓愈, 768-824); gods (ex. Guanyin 觀音); festivals, customs, animals, plants; or places and buildings).<sup>238</sup> Popular beliefs and festivals were described and many books on particular topics (36 in all) were published in the Folklore Series. Chao Wei-pang summarized the methodological choices taken by the Guangzhou school quoting the editorial written by Gu Jiegang for a special issue on legends. He wrote that work on legends was intended to "distinguish the legendary elements from historical facts, to focus on historical facts within legends and to trace the changing of legends. Mythological survivals both in folk-tales and legends were overlooked."<sup>239</sup> Thus, folklore research was subordinated to historical investigation, with popular beliefs discarded for the sake of a search for 'facts' in the task of rewriting the Chinese history.<sup>240</sup>

One of the most important innovations of the Guangzhou Institute was to embrace anthropological methodology and conduct the first field investigations in south-western provinces of the Republic. The novelty of anthropological research is especially visible if we look at the training Chinese anthropologists received and contacts they maintained in the early years of their careers. As Gregory E. Guldin claimed, the roots of this science were entirely foreign, dependent on the teaching of two Eastern European scholars: the Russian émigré Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff (1887-1939) who from 1922 taught in Qinghua University, Beijing; and an Oxford professor of Polish origin, Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942).<sup>241</sup> The history of Chinese anthropology is indivisible from the life of a student of both the above – Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 (1910-2005).<sup>242</sup> Since there is no space here to evaluate

<sup>238</sup> Ibid: 83-84. Interestingly the search for legends on mentioned people and gods continued till the 1980s, and their legends were incorporated into the collected traditions from places far from the original interests of the Guangzhou Institute of Philology and History. For an example from Chongqing, see: *Ba Yu*: 91-92 (on Han Yu), 213-214 (on Zhu Yuanzhang).

<sup>239</sup> Quoting *Folklore Weekly*, No. 47, Feb. 13, 1929: 1. See: Chao, 1943: 84.

<sup>240</sup> On Gu Jiegang mythology and related controversies see: Robin McNeal. "Constructing Myth in Modern China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (August, 2012): 679-686.

<sup>241</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin. 1994. *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao*. Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe.

<sup>242</sup> About Fei Xiaotong life and research, see: R. David Arkush. 1981. *Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

his work in any detail, it suffices to say that Fei's work spanned such areas as research into villages and minorities, thus permanently shaping the focus and methods of anthropological research in China.<sup>243</sup> Finally, the Institute also organized the first Chinese-run anthropological expeditions into the Han-borderlands and attempted to train its staff to branch out into fieldwork.<sup>244</sup> This early activity was fundamental in training a new generation of scholars and in the emergence of diverse aims such as linking research to rural reconstruction projects, or searching for a Chinese identity outside urban and elite cultures.

Summing up the pre-war development of folklore investigation we can see certain achievements in the areas of collection and classification of the gathered material; also notable was a progressive specialization and the development of new research aims. During the first years of the Folk-song Research Society's existence (between December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922 and late June, 1925) 13,339 songs were received from all corners of China, with the majority coming from Hebei, Yunnan, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Henan.<sup>245</sup> Additionally, the revived Beijing center (Institute of Letters) managed to gather an additional 1222 songs (mostly from Inner Mongolia). In three volumes of *Folk-song Weekly* (the third was interrupted by the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War) 825 songs were published. Editors organized the songs according to their province of origin (twenty in all) and social/genre roots. The latter classification included: folk-songs, mountain songs (*shan'ge* 山歌), children's songs, fishermen's songs, people's songs, tea-gatherer's songs, boatmen's songs, *xiaodiao* 小調 (small vocal-instrumental form), and riddle songs.<sup>246</sup> Most of the published material belonged to an overly general category of folk-songs.

A refocusing of the purposes of investigation was another change characteristic of the latter period of the Beijing school. As Chao Wei-pang stated "systematic investigation of folklore as

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<sup>243</sup> Full title: Fei Xiaotong. 1939. *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*. Preface by Bronislaw Malinowski. London: G. Routledge and New York: Dutton.

<sup>244</sup> The Institute of Philology and History did this in cooperation with Sergei Shirokogoroff whose expertise was essential for the success of the expeditions. Chao, 1943: 85-87. One of the main organizers of the Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan expeditions was Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (1887-1936) – geologist, geographer, and anthropologist famous both for professionalism and for placing extreme demands on junior colleagues. Magnus Fisekjö. "Science Across Borders, John Gunnar Anderson and Ding Wenjiang" in *Explorers and Scientists in China's Borderlands, 1880-1950*: 240-266.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid: 61.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid: 71-72. But no boat songs from Sichuan; Apart from Guizhou, South-Western China was underrepresented.

a step towards the projected social reform was entrusted to specialists in sociology and henceforth a more or less genuine literary aspect prevailed.”<sup>247</sup> Other especially important trends began with the research into the roots of ancient poetry in historical folklore, and with the analysis of the particular geographical spread of various genres and its consequences for Chinese culture. An example of such thinking can be found in the works of Wei Jiangong who claimed that the seven-syllable poem derived from mountain songs (*shan’ge*). Adopting this new methodological standpoint motivated the folklorists to undertake a historical analysis. In addition to the above-mentioned points, renewed efforts were put into creating more sophisticated genre classification systems. As an example here we can take the division of Guizhou 貴州 mountain songs into specific categories, comprising workman leaders’ songs (*haozi*), love songs, questions and answers, cursing songs, and miscellaneous songs, though little more is known about the reasons behind this classification.<sup>248</sup>

Moreover, in the 1930s the fascination with folklore expanded beyond the borders of the main academic institutions. Local folklore societies bloomed, especially in south-eastern cities, such as Xiamen, Fuzhou, Guangdong, Shantou, Hangzhou, Ningbo, etc.<sup>249</sup> Folklore investigation also spread to the inner regions of China. To mention one important case for us, the progressive Chongqing newspaper *Shangwu ribao* 商務日報 republished from March till August, 1933 a number of articles from *Minsu zhoukan* 民俗週刊. The ideological reason for undertaking a discussion on folklore was identical to that of the mainstream, promoted by the prominent Guangzhou Institute. In the 26<sup>th</sup> issue, an article “Discussing Customs” (民俗學論, *Minsu xuelun*) written by Kang Dinglun 康定倫 (n.d.) stated that customs are a foundation of the society and that studying them is necessary to understand that society, its present conditions, and to build a comprehensive (also local) Chinese history. Additionally, certain attempts were made to collect, publish and discuss popular songs and proverbs. Very often the purpose of such publications was mostly, however, far from academic. Researching songs was subservient to two dominant tasks of the reformist provincial elite: criticism of

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid: 72.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid: 73-74. For some additional information about the republican folklorists and especially on their infatuation with folk love songs see: Hung, 1985: 1-80.

<sup>249</sup> Chao, 1943: 81-82.

backward popular customs; and search for popular inspiration for a new national poetry. The former was especially visible in the series of articles run about the vulgarity of local customs, depicting them as being in direct methodological opposition to an investigation of genuine customs. The latter, nonetheless, occupied at least equal space: folk-like and folk-subject stories became widespread as a means for communicating a vision of local history and social issues in the vernacular language.<sup>250</sup>

## **Politicization of Folklore: The Sino-Japanese War and Maoist Popular Culture**

Much has been written recently about the usage and manipulation of popular traditions during the war years (1937-1945) as well as about the emergence of the Maoist paradigm of folklore research and creation till 1976. My task here is not to recount this story, nor to provide a detailed analysis of ethnographic research in these periods. On the other hand, I do want to point to the departures from the paradigms established before 1937, in order to trace the motivations and intellectual appropriations that have been propelling Chinese ethnography and anthropology from the death of Mao till the present day. If the leap backwards made in the late 1970s was rather confused in its rhetoric, it has been overwhelmingly clear in terms of human, institutional and academic development. Nonetheless, we should not be blind to the influence of the war and three decades of Maoism on the approach to popular traditions prevalent from 1976. Where necessary, these links will be pointed out below.

The contingency of the War of Resistance and especially its all-encompassing, destructive impact on the life of ordinary Chinese people, created a need for a new, propagandistic popular culture. Folksong research was largely substituted (though not in minority areas) with folklore creation, where intellectuals gave themselves the task of shaping the culture and attitudes of the suddenly swollen ranks of one social group – soldiers. With huge standing armies and suffering painful losses, both Nationalist and Communist authorities found keeping spirits from dropping to dangerous lows to be a vital task. For that reason it employed not only the party cadre but also patriotic intellectuals. The new songs (but also

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<sup>250</sup> *Shangwu ribao* 商務日報, Minsu zhoukan 民俗週刊, Sunday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933: 12.

operas, graphic arts etc.), differed from folklore in many ways, but above all, they expressed the validity of national rather than local experience. Speaking of events such as 7th of July, 1937 Incident (Marco Polo Bridge/Lugouqiao 蘆溝橋) or the loss of Wuhan to the Japanese (27<sup>th</sup> October, 1938), they were bound within a top-down reading of recent history, outside the personal feeling or experience of those who sang them.<sup>251</sup> Even though created as an answer to the war contingency, this practice of ‘creative’ treatment of folklore, especially on a massive, national scale set a new pattern for the role of intellectuals in relation to popular culture. This trend, however, was advanced much more forcefully within the rising Communist movement.

To understand the revolutionary shift in research as well as the break with the May 4<sup>th</sup> tradition, it is worth looking at the best researched case of revolutionized folkdance called *yangge* 秧歌. As Chang-tai Hung underlined, this popular genre of rice-planting songs (or rice-sprout songs) was widespread in all its diversity in the North of China. Hung described it as “[...] a performance that combines spirited dance, garish costumes, and loud music to form a colorful blend of rhythmic movements. The dance was closely associated with New Year rituals and celebrations, designed to dispel evil and to ensure a bumper harvest in the coming season.”<sup>252</sup> After Mao Zedong established the role of culture in the revolutionary effort (1942), the genre underwent a far-reaching change of content and form to convey much more complex political messages.<sup>253</sup> Soon the songs largely ceased to resemble the originals, becoming instead a centerpiece of mass song-and-dance performances broadcasting the propaganda of struggle and later of the victorious Chinese Communist Party.

If *yang’ge* is just one, overly exploited popular tradition, its history conveys many of the changes that marked Maoist approaches to folklore, which also operated for other arts in varying degrees. Firstly, it was separated from its social origin, and ceased to be a peasant

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<sup>251</sup> Wang Chunjie 王春杰. 2006. “Laobing zhi ge: Kangzhan zhuiyipianduan” 老兵之歌，抗戰追憶片斷, in *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhixie shanghuiyi Chongqingshi weiyuanhui xuexi ji wenshi weiyuanhui* 中國人民政治協商會議重慶市委員會學習及文史委員會. Chongqing wenshi zhiliao 重慶文史資料, Vol. 19. Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe: 309-316.

<sup>252</sup> Chang-tai Hung. 2011. *Mao’s New World: Political Culture in the Early People’s Republic*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press: 75.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid: 75-76.



song performed by peasants and directed to them. Instead it was rehearsed, staged and institutionalized by the propaganda departments to form a mass movement involving cadres, soldiers and intellectuals.<sup>254</sup> Secondly, its contents underwent rewriting, editing and revision processes to convey messages that were prescribed by the Communist Party, in this way divorcing the role and usage of the tradition from the group in which it originated. Thirdly, the place of performance was drastically altered: these old New Year rituals had sprawled onto the city's piazzas and streets, and even theaters, which they did not occupy before. The props were also changed: the lead singer's umbrella became a hammer and sickle; the actors waved red flags, makeup was also changed. Fourthly, the song became a vehicle of expression for professional dramatists, poets, and propaganda workers, conveying ideas entirely foreign to the original, while sometimes bringing to the genre a greater level of intellectual and artistic sophistication.<sup>255</sup>

*Yang'ge* thus ceased to be a folk tradition, but a tradition-based cultural product. Ironically, this early adaptation of the principle of "making the past serve the present" (*gu wei jin yong* 古為今用) resembled a radical implementation of some of Hu Shi's claims about the role of folk-songs (even though Hu Shi was the epitome of a rotten, westernized intellectual).<sup>256</sup> Moreover, this approach undermined previous efforts to collect and research folk traditions from parts of traditional Chinese society – it was meant to inject into the traditional forms a new vision of social order, at the same time motivating people to participate in its creation.

An especially vivid example of this process can be seen in the case of the so-called "revolutionary folk songs." As stated by Yang Mu, throughout the Maoist era, and even for more than a decade following it, "Chinese revolutionary folk songs" (革命民歌, *geming min'ge*) were considered to have been naturalized in certain areas of the People's Republic. These songs were meant to "praise socialism, communism, the government and its policies, the Communist Party and its leaders [...] their lyrics all have [...] revolutionary references."<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid: 76.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid: 76-91. For a more detailed study on *yang'ge* and its role in legitimizing power through art in PRC, see: David Holm. 1991. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 115-341.

<sup>256</sup> This principle swayed all areas of artistic life in early PRC, especially in the 1960s. For its influence in reshaping the reading of history through theater and operas, see: Paul A. Cohen. 2009. *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 138.

<sup>257</sup> Yang Mu. "Academic Ignorance or Political Taboo? Some Issues in China's Study of Its Folk Song Culture," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Music and Politics (Spring – Summer, 1994):305.

Due to the above-mentioned assumption as to their popularity and the preponderance of an ideologically constructed vision of) Chinese society, these songs received particularly generous treatment from the editors of the first post-Maoist song collection, *Zhongguo Minge* 中國民歌 (Chinese Folk Song).<sup>258</sup>

Yang's personal investigation into the areas of historical Communist overlordship, such as the old Jiangxi Soviets, showed that such a focus was displaced, incorrect and distorted reality. The revolutionary songs appeared to have been well known, especially by the semi-professional singers, yet outside the staged performances, they were easily discarded in favor of traditional tunes, such as work songs or love songs.<sup>259</sup> On this basis he stated that "[revolutionary] folk songs may exist in relatively large numbers in certain regions and during certain periods owing to political influence, but as a whole they are neither a large component of China's folk song nor in general sense the most important part of Chinese folk song. Furthermore, as folk songs created and transmitted in people's oral tradition, many such songs are of rather doubtful authenticity."<sup>260</sup> Yang's observations are important for a general understanding of the Maoist period approach to folklore, especially its divorce from the original text and instrumental usage of the traditions for political purposes.

Following Yang's observations, we can also find a substantial body of revolutionary songs among Sichuan boatmen's *haozi*, our main area of interest. Although by no means having comparable political importance to *yang'ge*, folk traditions from the Jiangxi Soviet or those from Yan'an 延安, these songs were equally infused with new meanings. Though giving it only one page in their monumental work, scholars, like Duan Ming and Hu Tianchang still recognized that revolutionary traditions were genuine expressions of happiness at newly gained freedom from a class-based oppressive society.<sup>261</sup> Even a quick look at these songs, however, betrays their unauthentic character. While almost all other boatmen's *haozi* were sung in dialect and have distinct references to the local and professional lives of the workers, revolutionary songs are panegyrics to Mao Zedong and the People's Liberation Army largely rendered in *Putonghua*. Also from the textual point of view, *haozi* are typically grave and

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid: 306.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid: 307-309.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid: 310.

<sup>261</sup> *Chuan*: 407-408.

ironic songs, which do not narrate a story, but rather express feelings or give opinions. The latter traditions, on the other hand, usually talk about the transformation experienced by boatmen from suffering in the “old society” to liberation in “New China.”<sup>262</sup> The political usage of boatmen’s songs is evident, though no in-depth research has been conducted on this subject, with major publications simply accepting the existence of some “red” topics within this tradition.

As with many other areas of Chinese academic life, ethnography came to an effective standstill during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).<sup>263</sup> Interestingly, previously observed themes also took radicalized forms. Popular songs and tunes, as Paul Clark demonstrated, were utilized and integrated into the model of song and dance shows. These syncretic song-and-dance productions on a huge scale substituted for all other forms of art and deepened the de-naturalization of art.<sup>264</sup> At the same time, any enquiry into the roots of folklore was discontinued. In fact, as some authors argued, the auditory monologue of the Cultural Revolution tended more toward modern art than recycled popular traditions.<sup>265</sup>

## The Second Life: Folklore and Anthropology After 1976

The post-1976 break away from the Maoist paradigm, with its active pursuit of folklore research, revival of anthropology and reopening to foreign academic influence, proved in a

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<sup>262</sup> Some of these songs can be still found in major collections. Their titles are very illustrative: “Heart of the boatmen turns to Chairman Mao” (船工心向毛主席, Chuangong xin xiang Mao zhuxi), “Life of Happiness Forever” (幸福生活萬萬年, Xingfu shenghuo wanwan nian), “Misery Will Never Return” (苦難一去不復返, Kunan yiqu bu fufan), and “Sweet Life of Happiness with No End” (甜蜜蜜的生活幸福無疆, Tianmimide shenghuo xingfu wujiang), etc. *Chuan*: 909-911.

<sup>263</sup> Anthropology, as an “imperialist science” took the blow even before, disappearing from academic curricula. More on the subject, see: Guldin: 81-145.

<sup>264</sup> Preceding Cultural Revolution by two years *The East is Red* (東方紅, Dongfang hong; staged in 1964; released as a film in 1965) can be seen as the production of the kind. Paul Clark. 2008. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 157-159

<sup>265</sup> “Much was also made, as in the Cultural Revolution, of learning from real life, so that some movements replicated real-life actions, though with artistic license to heighten and elaborate in the spirit of Mao’s *Talks* [1942] on art and literature. The mix of Chinese and Western Dance and real-life influences became typical of dance in the Cultural Revolution.” Ibid: 159. Also see: ibid: 249-261. On the war-time Communist approach to folklore studies and anthropology see also: Yen Chun-Chiang. “Folklore Research in Communist China,” *Asian Folklore Studies*, 1967: 1-62.

surprisingly short time to be the most fruitful period for both disciplines. Huge collecting and publishing projects accompanied by theoretical work fulfilled to a substantial degree the pre-1949 ambitions and shaped the perception and understanding of Chinese popular oral culture. All these achievements, however, were not even in the slightest degree, free of ideological choices and interpretations. Both the research on folklore and the folklore itself were to be socialistic: they were to represent the working people and they had to endorse proper values. Folklore was also meant to be nationalistic, in a sense very similar to that understood by the May 4<sup>th</sup> intellectuals. Moreover, the post-Mao generation of scholars reached an understanding of folklore, which although comprehensible from the perspective of their intellectual roots, was by no means free from constraints and misinterpretations. Most of the discussions that have taken place in recent decades have concerned two fields: categorization and questions of nationality. In other words, questions about how to classify traditions and who particular pieces belonged to came to the fore.

From the end of the 1970s, Chinese folklorists felt an increasing freedom to pursue their profession, and at the same time, to continue the tasks that were interrupted by the Maoist political campaigns. During the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee Congress of CCP (1978), Gu Jiegang and Zhong Jingwen proposed and successfully pushed through restoration of folklore and anthropology as recognized sciences in the People's Republic.<sup>266</sup> What followed was an immediate return to folklore investigation and a flurry of initiatives directed at editing and publishing already collected traditions. Irrespective, however, of the best intentions, enormous and it seems almost intractable problems haunted all the projects, to an extent that still defines the shape of Chinese folklore we know today. Firstly, shortage of academic staff and materials led to a much procrastinated start, with Beijing University taking the lead in the sometimes rushed training of future ethnographers. Secondly, researchers in new centers that opened around the country were undertrained and often not up to the professional standard. Most of the folklore investigation was also removed from the academic centers and conducted by the regional cultural bureaus down to the township level. The level of education and understanding on the ground appeared variable to the extreme. Fourthly, lack of financial resources for recording equipment, paper, and proper storage often affected negatively the outcome of research. Lastly, we need to

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<sup>266</sup> Guldin: 205.

recognize that in contrast to the Maoist decades, scholars in the 1980s and 90s restored and maintained a strong link with their foreign colleagues. They thus yielded a product, which should be seen as a compromise between local political constraints and internationally upheld standards.<sup>267</sup>

### **Ideology and Refining of Concepts**

Before we move to a discussion of the vast anthologies of folklore, which were the main achievements of post-Mao research and which constitute the main source of this thesis, we need to focus on the intellectual and ideological precepts that stood behind them. Fieldwork, editing and debate conducted in the 1980s all faced two basic questions: how to classify the various traditions, and how these traditions represented the Chinese nation. In the same breath another question was often added: what sort of nation were the Chinese people now? Similarly to the May 4<sup>th</sup> days, the relationship between songs and intellectuals was to produce the answer, although in the more than sixty years dividing the two debates new ideas, problems, methods, and needs had emerged.

In the 1980s, according to Sue Tuohy, it was the nationalist agenda that propelled the revived ethnography. Its main purpose was to search for the unity, continuity, common culture and experience and, above all, 'naturalness' of ethnic discourse. The nation was seen through the lens of primordial theory, aiming to prove the roots and long term passage of Chinese tradition into the present.<sup>268</sup> The main advocates of such an approach were the revivers of folklore themselves, Gu Jiegang and Zhong Jingwen. Both presided over a very popular movement called "searching for roots" (*xungen* 尋根).<sup>269</sup> The basic ideological framework was that established in the early period of scholarship, based on the theories adopted from Europe and Japan; more contemporary ideas, such as Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' were largely ignored.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Stephen Jones. "Reading between the Lines: Reflections on the Massive 'Anthology of Folk Music of the Chinese Peoples'," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003): 297-305.

<sup>268</sup> Sue Tuohy. "Metaphors and Reasoning: Folklore Scholarship and Ideology in Contemporary China," *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1991): 212-213.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid: 206.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid: 212-213.

The approach to minorities, a relatively novel topic gaining in prominence, had its roots in Stalin's theory of nationalities.<sup>271</sup> This involved a number of underlying assumptions which channeled research throughout the decade. Firstly, China was seen as a unity; one broad 'Chinese' ethnic group with historical continuity. This typically was not seen as a particularistic Han (*Hanzu* 漢族) phenomenon, but as the 'nationality of China' (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族). Secondly, a certain dichotomy was endorsed reflecting the politically tense issue of Chinese living in the PRC and in the overseas communities. Ethnographers considered national borders as definitive for their studies, while at the same time creating a separate notion of human borders that transcended contemporary political division and thus encompassed Hong Kong, Taiwan, South East Asia and other places of Chinese residence. Thirdly, unity was emphasized above diversity, especially in the areas of culture and social development.<sup>272</sup> In other words, the Chinese nation or Chinese civilization was viewed as a family, where various members differed from each other, but were essentially identical. This 'family' was characterized by its common traditions divided into: classical, ruling class, intellectual, folk, regional, philosophical, religious, and ethnic/national; all of them subdivided into the elite and popular (or folk) strains.<sup>273</sup> Culture, within the borders described above, was seen as a reflection of all actions of the Chinese people, a type of a treasure trove for present and future generations, whose meaning was basically positive.<sup>274</sup> As the notion of ethnicity was dominated by nationalistic ideology the study of folklore and study of folklore studies were also taken as typically Chinese preoccupations, in which they had historical primacy. Tao Lifan 陶立璠, for example, claimed that ancient scholars of the Han dynasty were already busy studying folklore.<sup>275</sup>

Thus, in the 1980s, the link between Chinese history, the profession of historian and folklorist, folklore and 'the nation of China' was reestablished. Folklore, even though by no means as subservient to propaganda work as during Mao's times, was to participate in the implementation of the Four Modernizations (*Sige xiandaihua* 四個現代化) and the

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid: 192-194.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid: 196-198.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid: 199.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid: 200-202.

<sup>275</sup> Tao Lifan 陶立璠. 1987. *Minsuxue gailun* 民俗學概論. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe: Xinhua shudian Beijing faxingsuo faxing: 12. About Tao's theories, see Tuohy: 202.

construction of national prosperity. Concurrently, new subjects of study emerged and old ones were reformulated. Zhou Xing 周星, one of the most prominent contemporary ethnographers, proposed a division of society into village (*nongcun* 農村), urban (*dushi* 都市), ethnic (*minzu* 民族) groups.<sup>276</sup> In fact, it was the latter that garnered most interest, emerging as the main preoccupation of folklorists and anthropologists fascinated with “otherness” and the exoticism of various groups.<sup>277</sup> For the majority of the Chinese population, the post-1989 revival of patriotism (*aiguo zhuyi* 愛國主義) as the main propagandistic message directed to the general population also started to be visible in renditions of folklore.<sup>278</sup>

The nationalistic platform for the research triggered controversies concerning categories and labels to be used for allegedly unique Chinese genres. As ethnography was increasingly viewed as having originally come from China, consequently adaptation of foreign terminology was immediately less acceptable. This was not, however, the only and probably not even the most important factor in development at that time. The ongoing study of a huge variety of regional and professional popular traditions created a pressing necessity for theoretical frameworks, which would underpin organization and classification of the enormous range of ethnographic material. The previously discussed principle of national unity as well as the intermingling of research and administrative divisions through which collection was organized, produced confusion and frequent duplication of the same texts in many parts of China. A large amount of work was required to overcome these shortcomings and establish a comprehensive overview of the immense richness of these traditions. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of more complex genres from a functionalist standpoint yielded a satisfactorily accurate reconstruction and sophisticated understanding of many already discontinued traditions.

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<sup>276</sup> Tuohy: 207.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid: 207. For more on Zhou’s theory and classification see: Zhou Xing 周星. “Zhongguo minsuxue yanjiu de xiandai sikao” 中國民俗學研究的現代思考 in Chen Qinjian 陳勤建, ed. 1988. *Dangdai Zhongguo minsuxue* 當代中國民俗學. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe: 15-29.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid: 208-211.

## Rethinking the Folksongs

Using definitive terms was considered to render folklore studies 'scientific'. Therefore in the authoritative publication, *The Handbook for Fieldwork on Folk Music (Minjian yinyue caifang shouce 民間音樂採訪手冊)*, which set principles for ongoing investigation and stood as a standard for future publications of anthologies, a system was proposed for all-China genre classification and cross referencing.<sup>279</sup> It divided popular oral traditions into five main genres of music, the so-called "five great types" (*wudalei 五大類*): folksong (*min'ge*), song and dance music, instrumental music, narrative song (*shuochang 說唱*), and opera. It needs to be noted that the concept of folksong was controversial and scholars never resolved the conflict as to the most appropriate term. The two most common names: *min'ge* 民歌, meaning broadly 'people's song' and *geyao* 歌謠 indicating a popular ballad, were rich in often conflicting associations both within the long Chinese musical tradition and in notions derived from Western (especially German and English) folkloristic traditions. In spite of many scholarly discussions and dissatisfaction with both concepts, frequently they appear to be used interchangeably.<sup>280</sup> The editors of the *Handbook for Fieldwork* agreed, however, that folksongs constituted a base from which other genres sprang up. Other national musicological publications further specified that folksongs were to be divided into four diverse types: work song (*laodong haozi 勞動號子*), mountain song (*shan'ge 山歌*), "popular song" (*xiaodiao 小調*), and customs and epic song.<sup>281</sup>

Many other versions of this division were also proposed. With the growing acceptance of the principle that popular traditions should be seen from the perspective of the environmental, nationality, and neighborhood background of each investigated social group, more theoretical and sophisticated divisions started to emerge. The supposed last word in the debates on classification belonged to the all-encompassing 1989 Chinese Encyclopedia,

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<sup>279</sup> Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan yinyue yanjiusuo Minjian yinyue caifang shouce bianjizu 中國藝術研究院音樂研究所民間音樂採訪手冊編輯組. 1986 (Rev. ed. 1963). *Minjian yinyue caifang shouce 民間音樂採訪手冊*. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe.

<sup>280</sup> Sue Tuohy. "The Social Life of Genre: The Dynamics of Folksong in China," *Asia Music*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring – Summer, 1999): 48-50.

<sup>281</sup> Tuohy, 1999: 52. Translation of genre and type names also: Tuohy: op.cit.



which tried to integrate Chinese and Western music history and propose a comprehensive theoretical framework.<sup>282</sup>

The Encyclopedia stopped using the concept of *shuochang* and substituted it with *quyi* 曲藝, which also describes narrative songs. It proposed seven “classificatory methods” for “folksong” (*min’ge*) and enforced a division between serious (*yansu* 嚴肅), classical (*gudian* 古典), and traditional folk music (*chuantong de minjian* 傳統的民間).<sup>283</sup> To understand this division a more extended quotation is necessary: “serious music includes: ‘folk music compositions that reflect the lives of working people, including folksongs (*min’ge*); traditional music of folk musicians (*minjian yiren* 民間藝人) or literati; imperial, political, or religious ritual music; composed European music since the Renaissance; and music of contemporary professional composers.”<sup>284</sup> New concepts about popular music were also put forward, such as “songs of the masses” (*qunzhong gequ* 群眾歌曲), which described folksongs expressing the thought, hopes and ambitions of the lower class people’s masses (*renmin qunzhong* 人民群眾). This included songs composed about social and political movements. Sue Tuohy commented on these years-long disputes: “One can only imagine the months of debate that accompanied the work on these classifications and the on-going controversies inspired by its publication, but these examples should more than suffice to demonstrate the intensity of intertextual practices within sites of classification and definition. Through this discourse and these structural relations, genres acquire meanings in relation to other genres.”<sup>285</sup>

Although the labels, classifiers and categories multiplied with time, and new publications and a rising number of scholars became involved in folklore investigation, the basic definitions of what a folksong is remained fairly consistent. Interestingly what was at stake was not the formal characteristics of the oral/musical form but its social and class origins.

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<sup>282</sup> Zhongguo dabaik quanshu zongbianji weiyuanhui Yinyue wudao bianji weiyuanhui 中國大百科全書總編輯委員會音樂舞蹈編輯委員會, ed. 1989. *Zhongguo dabaik quanshu: Yinyue wudao* 中國大百科全書音樂舞蹈. 1989. Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo dabaik quanshu chubanshe. Further: *Encyclopedia*.

<sup>283</sup> Tuohy, 1999: 53.

<sup>284</sup> Huang Xiaohe, 1989: 775 in *Encyclopedia*, Ibid: 53.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid: 53.

Additionally, the songs' function, in simplified terms, was taken into consideration. It is worth quoting here three distinct definitions, which in various reformulations exist today within Chinese scholarship.

The first states that: folksongs (*min'ge* 民歌) are the collective creations of the working people (*laodong renmin* 勞動人民) and are an artistic form (*xingshi* 形式) through which the working people express their thoughts, feelings, will, and aspirations; folksongs reflect the people's lives and, within their lives, folksongs are their closest companions [...] They are the people's 'spiritual nourishment' and the voices of their hearts."<sup>286</sup>

The second definition largely repeats earlier statements, even though it treats a supposedly different subject matter, namely the minority populations' popular songs. It says that "folksongs (*minjian gequ* 民間歌曲) are the collective creations of the people's (*renmin* 人民) aspirations, a form of the masses (*renmin qunzhong* 人民群眾) developed through a long process, undergoing widespread oral dissemination; folksong is an artistic form (*xingshi*) used by the masses to express their thoughts, feelings, will, and aspirations."<sup>287</sup>

Li Naikun, even though writing about folklore in the Anglo-Saxon world, contributed another definition visibly oriented toward a Chinese academic audience and meant to influence the discussion about his country's popular culture. He saw folksongs (*geyao*) as a "type of orally transmitted folklore with nationality (*minzu*) and local styles; they represent the customs and feelings of the masses (*minzhong* 民眾) and are a crystallization of the thought and spiritual essence of the people (*minzu*)."<sup>288</sup>

Generally considered expressions of the people's worldview, popular songs remained a contested material and a field of ideological conflict. Marxist classifiers were not compatible with the colloquial expressions abounding in popular traditions; particularistic content on

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<sup>286</sup> Zhongguo yishu xueyuan yinyue yanjiusuo 中國藝術學院音樂研究所. 1983. *Minzu yinyue* 民族音樂: 9. Translation by Tuohy, 1999: 54

<sup>287</sup> Du Yaxiong 杜亞雄. 1986. *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu yinyue (yi)* 中國少數民族音樂 (一). Vol. 1. Beijing: Zhongguo wenyi chubanshe: 45. Translation by Tuohy, 1999: 55.

<sup>288</sup> Li Naikun 李乃坤. "Zhongguo geyao yu Ying Mei geyao" 中國歌謠與英美歌謠 in Li Naikun and Dong Yuanji 董元驥. 1993. *Zhongwai minsuxue bijiao yanjiu* 中外民俗學比較研究. Ji'nan: Shandong daxue chubanshe: 293. Translation by Tuohy, 1999: 55.

the other hand ran against the teleological view of Chinese history endorsed by most scholars believing in the struggle between backward and progressive social classes.<sup>289</sup>

Historically folksongs were seen as “vulgar or undesirable (lou 嘍)” or as rebellious against classical orthodoxy and officials opposed to studying and publishing them.<sup>290</sup> In the decades preceding the Sino-Japanese War, they were also perceived as reinvigorating or purifying the “moribund culture” of the elites, and in the 1930s and 40s as mobilizing a nation beset by war. In the 1980s, when the CCP was busy recreating a market-based economy while maintaining socialist (*shehui zhuyi* 社會主義) virtues and mores, the opening of attitudes toward popular traditions posed a rather grave problem. Ma Ke 馬可 in his 1957 book republished in 1981 stipulated that “folksongs [...] contain a negative and vulgar portion, but this is the result of the influence of landlords and ruling classes, sordid merchants, and gangsters and does not represent the real tradition (*chuantong* 傳統) of folk music (*minjian yinyue* 民間音樂).”<sup>291</sup> Other scholars also insisted on the existence of “problem areas” arising from outside interference, which obscured original meanings by injecting ruling class ideology.<sup>292</sup> Consequently, the songs needed some form of selection, edition, and correction to become acceptable and to perform their role of (portraying/expressing) ideological struggle in the new social reality.

At the same time, Ma Ke, Zhong Fulan 仲富蘭 and other scholars were pointing to the persistent prejudice against popular music, too often seen as vulgar and deficient in artistic value.<sup>293</sup> To overcome the bad press that popular art received, they advocated an organized and institutionalized approach to its promotion. Such attitudes were a direct endorsement of the guidelines provided by the above-mentioned *Handbook for Fieldwork* (1986), which stated that the main aim of folklore scholarship is “to nurture the nation-wide development

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<sup>289</sup> Tuohy, 1999: 55.

<sup>290</sup> Anne McLaren provides an example of such official persecution of popular songs in the Lower Yangzi Delta region: McLaren, Anne. “Folk Epics from the Lower Yangzi Delta Region: Oral and Written Traditions” in Børdahl and Wan, 2010: 160.

<sup>291</sup> Ma Ke 馬可. 1981 (1957). *Zhongguo minjian yinyue jianghua* 中國民間音樂講話. Yinyue zhishi congshu 音樂知識叢書. Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe. Translation by Tuohy: 56.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid: 56.

<sup>293</sup> Zhong Fulan 仲富蘭. 1990. *Xiandai minsu liubian* 現代民俗流變. Shanghai: Xinhua shudian: 1-2. Quoted after Tuohy, 1999.

of folk music collection and fieldwork... [and] to continue the legacy of national music... by entering the lives of the masses (*qunzhong*) through direct and first-hand research.”<sup>294</sup> Sue Tuohy summarized their attitude in the following way:

“Elevating the position of the masses both historically and today has been one of the most commonly cited and explicit goals of scholarship in the PRC. This elevation necessitates reconceptualizing the tradition of Chinese literature and music by conferring equal status to folksong in the cultural heritage and in contemporary culture.”<sup>295</sup>

Scholarly work in effect often still resembled the work of government propaganda clerks rather than that of genuine researchers of popular traditions.

### **Current Trends: Folk Songs and Ethnomusicology**

It would be hard, however, to claim that current efforts at research and publication of folklore are not outcomes of genuine and scholarly interest or that stated values undermine the quality of such work. Rigid application of scientific methodology, presentation of a variety of versions of every tradition, recordings of the most popular songs, in depth research on their linguistic and musical aspects, as well as involvement of Western scholars and methods all provide evidence against such simplification. When blunt declarations of political correctness stopped being a necessary precondition for publication, they were simply omitted, revealing a much more internationalized and science-oriented trajectory especially of Chinese ethnomusicology, but also of folklore studies and anthropology. Not so much a shift in method and analysis, but more in the means of presentation, most recent studies have shown a preference for definitions based on a combination of Western and Chinese achievements in researching folklore.<sup>296</sup> What substitutes for the political use of culture is a realization of the complex historical, social and individual circumstances participating in the creation of culture and music in general and popular music in particular.

In this vein, Wu Fan 吴凡, one of the leading contemporary musicologists redefined Chinese music in accordance with the theories of Clifford Geertz and Timothy Rice. Quoting Rice’s

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<sup>294</sup> *Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan yinyue yanjiusuo*, 1986: ix. Translation: Tuohy: 57.

<sup>295</sup> Tuohy, 1999: 57.

<sup>296</sup> See: Daniel L. Overmyer and Shin-Yi Chao, eds. 2002. *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results*. Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China: Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd.

diagram, which represented music as an interchange between historical construction, social maintenance and individual adaptation and experience, Wu accepted each of the areas as necessary and valid directions of study necessary for the comprehension of any musical tradition. For music Wu provided a minimal definition: "sound with meaning is music."<sup>297</sup> Wu also proposed a comprehensive definition of popular music:

Folklore music is a remnant of traditional culture preserved till the present, it has both the characteristics of the musical culture type, because common people primarily base [their culture] on oral memorization, produced in a way that aids memory and symbolically orders space; and it links together the most intimate customs and beliefs of the people, it is a performance in sound of the meaning of the oral non-material [spiritual] culture.<sup>298</sup>

Popular music was thus seen immersed in its social, historical and symbolic functions, as well as representing the elements of material life essential for particular groups performing such art. It was seen as indivisible from the social or ethnic group that possessed and performed it. What these definitions also signify, is the inclusion of performance theory, as outlined by Richard Bauman, which emphasizes the form and way of communicating rather than the message that is transferred.<sup>299</sup>

With the growing exchange and understanding between Chinese, Taiwanese and Western scholars the shift of focus and definitions as signaled by Wu Fan has become widespread. Current studies are characterized by an extensive focus on the formal characteristics of artists' performances and the public's familiarity with the genre and ability to evaluate storytelling and opera. These studies emphasize the role of social milieu, cultural awareness of the audience, and mastery of speech, singing, and movement on the side of popular artists, which are all necessary elements of popular art.<sup>300</sup> Following a similar pattern, anthropologists have focused extensively on the ritual forms and art connected with

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<sup>297</sup> "一種意義的聲音。這就是音樂" Wu Fan 吳凡. 2006. *Minjian yinyue* 民間音樂. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe: 7-13.

<sup>298</sup> "民間音樂是傳統文化中留存至今的, 兼具古老現實特徵的音樂文化類型, 是由普通民眾主要依靠口傳心授方式集體創作與傳承的, 作為一種集體記憶與秩序空間的象徵符號, 與民俗活動民間信仰密切相連的人類口頭非物質文化的一種有意義的聲音及表演." Ibid: 20-21.

<sup>299</sup> Bauman: 290-311.

<sup>300</sup> Børdahl, 2003: 65-112.

religious celebrations, looking especially at local opera performances taking place during religious celebrations. Their main achievement can be seen as a movement away from the over-generalized and textually based reading of culture by contextualizing it within local society and its historical experience.<sup>301</sup>

### **Regional Forms and Haozi – Defining Chinese Work Songs**

The development of concepts of regional differentiation and definitions of genres has been one of the main achievements of recent years and is of special interest for our further discussions. As we have seen, scholars have been trying to unite the typology of Chinese folk art in using categories valid for all the ethnic groups inhabiting the country. In the event, the concept developed in the 1980s of the “five great types” (*wudalei*) consisting of folksongs, song-and-dance, instrumental music, narrative songs, and opera has been adopted by most specialists engaging with the subject. Within this framework, however, there was and is barely any agreement on how many genres and their sub-types should exist. Different types of songs are being moved from one genre to another by scholars according to their expertise. What we need to underline here is that scholars have agreed on existence of a large regional variety among Chinese (meaning Han nationality; excluding minorities) popular song traditions. They have also endorsed the point that in addition to functional differentiation among particular genres, there are unique local forms and that research and discussion have to be focused on them.

The “regionalization” of ethnomusicological analysis came from the acceptance of multiculturalism as a framework for understanding Chinese culture and propaganda work, which endorsed local patriotism as a constructive element of Chinese identity. Consequently scholars tried to demarcate the borders of Han cultural tradition. One of the most broadly accepted opinions on that topic was taken by Miao Jing 苗晶 and Qiao Jianzhong 乔建中 who on the basis of old cultural traditions, local dialect, social background, migration patterns, and popular song traditions proposed a division into 11 color areas (*secaiqu* 色彩區). They were: Northeast plain (Dongbei 東北), Northwest highlands (Xibei 西北), Yangzi-Huai rivers (Jianghuai 江淮), Lower Yangzi plain (Jiangzhe 江浙), Fujian-Taiwan (Mintai 閩/閩

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<sup>301</sup> For an overview and critique, see: Overmyer and Chao.

臺), Cantonese (Yue 粵), Middle-Yangzi plain (Jianghe 江河), Hunan (Xiang 湘), Jiangxi (Gan 贛), Southwest (Xi'nan 西南), and Hakka (Kejia 客家).<sup>302</sup> With an even stronger emphasis on the multiple roots of Chinese culture, this was accepted by contemporary scholars like Wu Fan. They took as their motto the ideas of “many roots” (*duoyuan* 多元) and of “many songs have identical names but are different or have different names but are the same.”<sup>303</sup>

In this context, the classification of folksongs started to be enriched by enquiries into locally extant forms and previous interest in the nation-binding classification started to lose its relative attraction. Since our focus here is on work songs (*haozi*), we will discuss only this case, leaving other genres aside. Commonly, work songs were seen as one of the three big traditions of Chinese singing, which included also mountain songs (*shan'ge*) and ‘small tunes’ (*xiaodiao*). The Chinese Encyclopedia, Music Volume divided *haozi* into five subcategories of “transportation songs” (*banyun* 搬運), “production songs” (*gongcheng* 工程), “rural work songs” (*nongshi* 農事), “sailing/fishing songs” (*chuanyu* 船魚), and “construction songs” (*zuofang* 作坊). In his 1989 article, basing his findings on three underlying principles: scales and modes, melodic progression and musical form Han Kuo-Huang claimed that work songs can be divided into “transporting”, “construction”, “farming”, “sailing and fishing”, and “miscellaneous” (other professions) songs.<sup>304</sup> In contrast, and in disagreement as usual, Qian Rong 錢茸 added to the list also “chanting songs”, which were, in his mind unjustly placed within the more leisure-oriented forms of *xiaodiao*.<sup>305</sup> Whatever sub-classes were proposed, the definition of the work song was and has remained consistent. It is worth quoting extensively here from the definition provided by Han:

<sup>302</sup> Miao Jing 苗晶, Qiao Jianzhong 乔建中. 1987. *Lun Hanzu minge jinsi secai qu de huafen* 論漢族民歌近似色彩區的劃分. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe: 58-61.

<sup>303</sup> “‘Tongming yiqu’ huo ‘tongqu yiming’” “同名異曲’或’同曲異名” Wu Fan: 18 and 26-29. More primitive differentiations were also common, like the division between northern and southern traditions, as explained by Han Kuo-Huang. Han Kuo-Huang. “Folk Songs of the Han Chinese: Characteristics and Classifications,” *Asian Music*, Vol. 20, No. 2 Chinese Music Theory (Spring – Summer, 1989): 107-109.

<sup>304</sup> Han Kuo-Fang: 113-116.

<sup>305</sup> Qian Rong 錢茸, “Yinchangdiao zai min'ge fenleizhongde guishu” 吟唱調在民歌分類中的歸屬, *Yinyue yanjiu (jikan)* 音樂研究 (季刊), No. 4 (December, 1993): 71-74.

The Chinese name for this category, *haozi*, means “crying” or “shouting,” an indication of its origins in labor. The function of this type of song is to accompany work or to relieve hardship during work. Most work songs feature strong rhythms, and for each a basic rhythmic pattern underlies the entire piece. This is true of the work songs of any people in the world. Melodic material is rather limited and ostinato used frequently. Work songs are exclusively vocal and the range is normally wide. Texts are not organized in any established poetic form and there are numerous vocables used. Solo, unison, duet and call-and-response are typical manners of performance according to specific work conditions. There are five sub-types of work songs: 1. Transporting Songs. This sub-type refers to songs sung by laborers who carry, drag, or push a heavy load. Due to the extreme physical requirements associated with these activities, most of the songs are short and sung in loud voices. [...]<sup>306</sup>

Already in the 1980s, these definitions started to acquire a more regionalized shade. In his 1984 article, Kuang Tianqi 匡天齊 made a distinction between the transportation songs confined to workers busy with moving objects on land, carrying sedan chairs etc. and unique river workers’ songs (or trackers’ songs; *chuangong haozi* 船工號子). From other categories he listed only production, construction and rural songs.<sup>307</sup> Such recognition of local particularity quickly ceased to be in any way revelatory and became a corner stone of folk song studies on Sichuan and especially on Chongqing popular culture. The 2000 *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* (*Sichuansheng zhi* 四川省志), stated that:

[...] among the Sichuan workers’ songs, those of the river trackers are the most particular. [...] [They] have an individual cultural flavor. On every river of Sichuan where there were boats, workers sang; whatever the river flow was, *haozi* adjusted to it; it directed the step, helped overcome rapids and waves. The voice and tune of *haozi* was set according to natural conditions, human nature, the river’s slow or rapid

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<sup>306</sup> Han Kuo-Fang: 113.

<sup>307</sup> Kuang Tianqi 匡天齊. “Sichuan hanzu mingede fenlei yu leibie tedian” 四川漢族民歌的分類與類別特點, *Yinyue tansuo* 音樂探索, No. 3 (1984): 48-49.



flow and boat's load – all of them evoked and directed through workers' shouts (voices; *huhan* 呼喊).<sup>308</sup>

The specificity of the songs was not only visible in the unique social environment from which they sprang, but also in the variety of forms. The definitions provided by Han Kuo-Fang and in the Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer are complimentary and basically satisfactory. The former gives us a general understanding of the category, whereas the latter specifies its regional meaning. The only problematic area lies in an unexplained "individual cultural flavor." Even so, such a statement is acceptable if we interpret it as a culture springing out of the historical socio-economic conditions of the boatmen. I would also enrich it by taking into account the ideas of Ted Gioia on work songs – that such traditions were indivisible elements of work and life of the professions and should not be considered in any manner separated as an abstracted 'art'.<sup>309</sup> In the following chapters of this thesis we are going to observe how this definition expands through an analysis of the cultural content of the Sichuan *haozi*.

Scholars working on the *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* and later writers on boatmen's songs have proposed a number of detailed categories unique to these particular work songs. Since they are going to be analyzed in the next chapter, here I will give only few points in summary. Basically, the categorization was devised to represent the songs' functions as tools of work for the Sichuan boatpeople. The particular characteristics of each song (and thus the place and function of performance) was determined by analyzing the standard (or most frequently repeated) sounds uttered by the leading voice with the corresponding voices of the other workers calling back.<sup>310</sup> Depending on the analysis, it enabled the musical tradition of boatmen's *haozi*, to be broken down into a number of groups. For example, the *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* lists six types of songs for going up and down river respectively. Deng Shao 鄧曉 lists more than thirteen kinds and points to particularities relating to each river, eg. the Nanguang River (Nanguanghe 南廣河) had six unique *haozi* types, and the Jialing River had four other particular traditions.<sup>311</sup> The method used to create these divisions was

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<sup>308</sup> *Sichuansheng zhi*: 621.

<sup>309</sup> Gioia: 8-12.

<sup>310</sup> *Sichuansheng zhi*: 621-624.

<sup>311</sup> Deng Xiao 鄧曉. "'Chuanjiang haozi' de wenhua neihan" '川江號子'的文化內涵, *Zhongguo wenhua luntan* 中華文化論壇, No. 1 (2005): 17-18.

an inquiry into the musical quality of the songs, which largely overlooked their content, but tried to understand them as music and as utilitarian tools for work. Scholars also claimed that the source of variety was geographically related: each major river of Sichuan had its individual set of songs, as the environmental and social conditions of work differed quite significantly.<sup>312</sup> Nevertheless, they are of great use to us for understanding the place occupied by the songs in Sichuan river work. They also make us aware of perhaps the most unique musical trait of Sichuan boatmen's *haozi* – their malleability and immediate adaptability to changing conditions. To a certain extent, the sound of *haozi* mattered just as much as their content; thus without discussing the sound, we are not able to understand the culture of people who sang them.

### **Producing Anthologies of Chinese Folklore**

As was stated before, the all-encompassing anthologies of folklore were the main products of intensive scientific inquiry into popular culture. The biggest project, and also the most important for us, was called *Zhongguo geyao jicheng* [*The Anthology of Chinese Popular Songs*]. A very ambitious project, it spanned all the provinces of China, reflecting and corresponding to the country's administrative divisions. It consisted not only of Han traditions but also included songs of the minority populations. The project was the outcome of extensive fieldwork and each song was supplied with an appropriate critical apparatus, such as the names of singers and recorders as well as explanations of rare or regional words. The scale of the project was enormous and each tome contains several thousand songs; nevertheless this number still constitutes only a small percentage of gathered material and later editions often picked up on the unpublished material. The survey work on the folk song anthology was a part of a larger national project aimed at collecting and preserving all popular musical material as well as regional projects with the same ambition.<sup>313</sup>

It needs to be mentioned that these folksong collections, due to their size and importance, faced multiple technical and ideological obstacles, visible in their very unequal quality. As quoted already, Yang Mu pointed out that the early volumes tended to be still bound by previous paradigms focusing disproportionately on revolutionary songs and therefore

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<sup>312</sup> See: Chen Xinming 陳鑫明. "Chuanjiang haozi" 川江號子, *Xungen* 尋根 2009: 100-101.

<sup>313</sup> The biggest project in the area of music was called *Zhongguo minzu minjian yinyue jicheng* 中國民族民間音樂集成. See: Jones: 297.

breaching the rule of authenticity in folklore research. This point was later criticized by Stephen Jones who demonstrated that a broad category of revolutionary traditions (meaning not only those from Mao's era but also referring to the 1911 revolution or social conflicts) are closely linked with such genres as work songs (*haozi*) or love songs (*qingge*).<sup>314</sup> In fact, the problem of selection according to Jones was much more complex and intrinsically connected with the intellectual and political debates of the 1980s. As some of the cadres collecting and preparing the *Anthology* had told Jones, they were intentionally eliminating any traditions relating to Socialism, the CCP or Chairman Mao. Moreover, as the attitude toward religion and ritual was still ambivalent, the songs and operas that were targeted by the project typically appeared more secular than they might have been in reality.<sup>315</sup> Additionally, especially in the case of opera, the *Anthology* inherited a legacy of decades-long professionalization within state sponsored musical and actor troupes.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, Jones et al. pointed out that the prevalent division of popular culture according to current administrative units (a practice already present in the earliest studies of folklore as seen in *Folk-lore Weekly*), conflicted with the supra-provincial range of the popular traditions.<sup>317</sup> Many forms, especially operatic ones can be found in most Chinese provinces and their particular traits cannot be pinned to one precise location. Such classification creates false borders and impairs understanding of the very genres scholars intended to illuminate and analyze.

Three publications of these projects are of great importance here: *Zhongguo geyao jicheng Chongqingshi juan* 中國歌謠集成重慶市卷 [*Anthology of Chinese Folksongs, Volume on Chongqing Municipality*] published in 1989;<sup>318</sup> *Chuanjiang haozi* 川江號子 [*Work Songs of Sichuan Rivers*];<sup>319</sup> collected, compiled and published in 2007 by Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng and (though to a lesser extent), *Ba Yu minjian wenxue huicui* 巴渝民間文學薈萃

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid: 306-309.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid: 309.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid: 310-312.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid: 312-314.

<sup>318</sup> Full quotation: Nie Yunlan 聶雲嵐, Peng Weijin 彭維金, He Dashun 賀大舜, eds. 1989. *Zhongguo geyao jicheng Chongqingshi juan* [*Anthology of Chinese Folksongs, Volume on Chongqing Municipality*]. Chongqing: Kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe Chongqing fenshe.

<sup>319</sup> Full quotation: Duan Ming 段明 and Hu Tiancheng 胡天成. 2007. *Chuanjiang haozi*. Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe.

萃 [*The Assembled Popular Literature from Ba Yu (Chongqing)*]<sup>320</sup> published in 1992. Our first source, *The Anthology* was an unprecedented work in its scale and the number of people involved. Its aim was to gather and codify the most valuable elements of the Chongqing region traditions, i.e. the works whose textual, musical and moral values were outstanding. Such an approach, as the editors claimed, was comparable to “sifting through mud to find gold sand” and thus it produced “small results for great efforts [invested].”<sup>321</sup> What was considered “mud” were the traditions that offended contemporary senses of morality and appropriateness, typically related to what was seen to be vulgar, offensive, pornographic or superstitious content.

Nevertheless, the *Anthology*, or at least its Chongqing volume, cannot be viewed as a purified and politically correct edition, artificially divided from the milieu of the local culture. It contains a very substantial number of songs informative about religious rituals, local beliefs, and more occasionally ghosts and demons. Nor are the collected songs particularly restricted in talking about desire, but it would be difficult to find much about sex, except in the form of references to prostitution. The vocabulary of the songs must have sometimes been edited; localisms are frequent whereas swear words are rare. Still, what the authors presented was only ten percent of the whole material gathered; the remainder was considered either repetitive or of little value.

*The Anthology* was not solely focused on work songs (called generally *laodongge* 勞動歌, “labor songs”), though it gives them prominent first place among the other traditions. Other songs included in the volume are love songs (*qingge* 情歌), ritual songs (*yishige* 儀式歌), political songs (*shizhengge* 時政歌), life condition songs (*shenghuoge* 生活歌), historical-narrative songs (*lishi chuanshuoge* 歷史傳說歌), and children’s songs (*erge* 兒歌). In choosing such an approach, the authors claimed they not only strictly followed the project’s regulations (“Zhongguo geyao jicheng bianji fang an”, 中國歌謠集成) 編輯方案), but also adjusted them to the regional characteristics and historical conditions of the old class society

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<sup>320</sup> Full quotation: Jin Xiangming 金祥明, Zhong Youling 鐘游玲, Ran Zhuang 冉庄, Yang Zhongjin 楊忠全, eds. 1992. *Ba Yu minjian wenxue huicui* 巴渝民間文學薈萃. Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe.

<sup>321</sup> ZGYJC: 3.

these songs represented. In total, scholars working on *The Anthology* gathered more than 7000 songs, out of which 1300 were chosen for publication in various collections. *The Anthology* itself contains 605 of them. There are 105 work songs, 70 political songs, 155 love songs, 100 life condition songs, 9 historical narrative songs, and 64 children's songs.<sup>322</sup>

The criticism of Yang Mu regarding folklore collections made in the 1980s is not particularly valid for the Chongqing volume, as revolutionary songs occupy a very limited space.<sup>323</sup> I find, however, the almost total absence of this tradition quite problematic both because these tunes are still in vogue among broad groups of urban Chinese and because it reveals another type of preference on the side of the editors. The point made by Stephen Jones is very valid in this respect. He claimed that ethnographic research in the 1980s was driven by a sentimental notion of restituting the Chinese traditional past, one untouched by modernity or revolutions.<sup>324</sup> Such an attitude on the part of the scholars, led to the elimination of revolutionary songs and encouraged people to sing the 'real' songs, thus ignoring the much more flexible and adaptable character of popular traditions. It needs to be noted that in the case of *The Anthology*, many of the editors' intentions can only be inferred. The songs, with very few exceptions, were neither analyzed from the textual point of view, nor were any omissions indicated.

The second collection, edited by Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng, is devoted only to boatmen songs and especially to their work songs (*haozi*). The title is slightly imprecise, as it claims that only songs from Chuanjiang 川江, i.e. the upper reaches of the Yangzi between Yibin 宜賓 (Southern Sichuan) and Yichang, are in the volume. In fact, the focus was broader and spanned traditions from most of the river regions in Eastern and Southern Sichuan. The collection consists of two volumes: the first is devoted to analysis of the boatmen work songs and to presenting their texts. The second volume contains the music scripts of all the gathered *haozi*. The *Work Songs of Sichuan Rivers* contains 259 texts of songs divided into subject categories: "expressing love to one's native land" (*xiangtu fengqing lei* 鄉土風情類) – 29 songs; "boatmen's lives" (*chuangong shenghuo lei* 船工生活類) – 74 songs; "love songs

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<sup>322</sup> ZGYJC: 2-7, 11.

<sup>323</sup> Yang Mu: 303-320.

<sup>324</sup> Jones: 287-337.

between men and women” (*nannü lianqing lei* 男女戀情類) – 80 songs; “waking calls” (*xingshi jingyan lei* 醒世警言類) – 21 songs; “speaking ill of the government” (*baobian shizheng lei* 褒貶時政類) – 25 songs; “legends and stories” (*chuanshuo gushi lei* 傳說故事類) – 12 songs; others (*qita lei* 其他類) – 18 songs. Also there were eight other traditions, mostly of rural origin, which Duan and Hu found musically and textually related to boatmen’s work songs.

Overall, the work of Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng is also richer in form and content than any previous anthology. The authors give some historical background of the traditions (encompassing local history, society and economy), music notation of the melodies, musicological discussion of the genre, and biographies of the singers. Although much more sophisticated than *The Anthology*, it is however, not free of ideological choices and some historiographical mistakes. Firstly the authors still follow the principle of choosing what is considered most valuable. Secondly, as with much current local scholarship, they overemphasize the antiquity of the tradition, following the curious trend of local particularism compounded with Chinese nationalism.<sup>325</sup> Thirdly, though from a certain perspective it is more a strength than a weakness, the *Work Songs of Sichuan Rivers* is directed more to ethnomusicologists than historians. This is visible in the quality of chapters devoted to the musical characteristics of *haozi* compared to the discussion of this tradition’s historical development.

While focusing on researching sound, its forms and functions Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng neglected the contents of songs relying instead on some oversimplified interpretations which had been circulating within Sichuan academic circles for decades. The interpretation given to *haozi* was standardized and simply enforced the central notions of regional and national cultural history, such as the millennia long origins of Sichuan work songs or the immutable character of regional culture. The work songs of Sichuan became a source for historical inquiry into local culture and therefore an accepted proof of regional civilization particularity seen in *longue durée*. Neither Duan nor Hu were exceptional in voicing such a political agenda. Wu Mingshi 伍明實, writing in 2011, asserted that the river song tradition

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<sup>325</sup> Historical analysis of the Sichuan work songs see: *Chuan*: 329-346.

was of ancient origin and that plentiful sources, both written and archeological, prove the existence of a rich river life as early as Eastern Han times (23-220 CE). Wu gives literary proofs of river songs only from the Qing dynasty, and as lively boat traffic in the preceding periods cannot be doubted, the long -standing existence of currently known songs should also be beyond doubt.<sup>326</sup> Assuming roots stretching back to antiquity, gave the *haozi* long-needed respectability, removing it from among popular forms and placing it within higher art, which is how it is presently regarded in the PRC.<sup>327</sup> Projects, such as the one undertaken by Duan Ming and Hu Tianchang, though equipped with superior apparatus and very detailed musicological analysis, suffered from the nationalistic and locally patriotic discourses prevalent in local academic circles.

The third source, *The Assembled Popular Literature from Ba Yu* is probably the most thorough collection of folklore traditions from Chongqing and the area. Apart from a rich set of local legends (*shenhua* 神化) and folk tales (*diming gushi* 地名故事), it also contains boatmen songs, as well as proverbs (*yanyu* 諺語) from the region. Although I am going to exploit it only in a very limited way, a few words are necessary about the editing practice which led to creation of this work and the context in which it appeared. Its editors state in the introduction that their main aim is not only to safeguard and promote local culture, but to purify it of unwanted elements by “saving what is best and discarding what is obsolete.”<sup>328</sup> Such statements have to be understood from two perspectives emerging in the 1980s. One was faithfulness to conservative and non-revolutionary “socialist culture” promoted with the Four Modernizations; another was the newly emergent local patriotism and fascination with regional cultures. As Peng Botong, a writer whose book from 1981 also dealt with Chongqing oral folklore, put it: “we would like to pluck a few leaves and scattered pieces from the tree of Chongqing’s past and present, to encourage the peoples’ love for the motherland (*zuguo* 祖國), love for people (*renmin*), love for native place (*jiaxiang* 家鄉), in order to add our meager force to building a civilization filled with the spirit of socialism

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<sup>326</sup> Wu Mingshi 伍明實. “Chuanjiang haozi xianzhuang diaocha baogao” 川江號子現狀調查報告, *Zhongguo wenhua luntan* 中國文化論談, No. 3 (2011): 35.

<sup>327</sup> Many former boatmen became nationally successful performers singing in concert halls across the country and in the capital. Ibid: 40.

<sup>328</sup> *Ba Yu*: 2.

(*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming* 社會主義精神文明).”<sup>329</sup> As we can see, at least in the declared objectives of research and publication, scientific ends were often secondary to political ones.

## Conclusion

In the century-long development of Chinese folklore studies, folk songs occupied a central position among researched and discussed forms of popular art. Their study was undertaken in order to promote a new literary language and thus revive Chinese culture. It was equally central both for construction of the post-imperial Chinese nation and for the revolutionary reshaping of the society led by Mao Zedong. The revival of research in the 1980s, although taking a much more scholarly oriented approach was also not free of political aims. The extensive collections of Chinese folklore, which provide the basic source for studying twentieth century popular culture, were compiled with the idea of asserting the regional particularity and multiculturalism of China. What was often hidden under this concept was a desire to advance new patriotism, springing both from difference and unity. In no lesser extent than before, it was also filled with a reformist ideal leading to the promotion of an artistically refined and appropriate, or simply not vulgar, vision of popular art. No single track, however, was advanced in any of these directions. Specialists broadly communicating with their foreign colleagues and trying to achieve both a more universal and a more detailed understanding of Chinese folklore were seriously concerned with the authenticity of the popular culture they published. This is especially visible in the field of ethnomusicology, which allows us to see such forms as *haozi* within their various functions and adaptations, according to the social, historical, and environmental characteristics of their origin. Given the very mature state of the field, especially in the area of definitions, characterization of genres, and recording of variety (especially in musical notation), it is surprising that these songs were not treated, apart from very general statements, as a source through which to engage with workers’ mentality. Having focused on the value of such traditions in the process of their development from oral art to recorded source, we can now proceed with their musicological, cultural and historical analysis.

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<sup>329</sup> Peng, 1981: 338.



## CHAPTER 3: THE SOUNDS

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領: 嘢哦羅一號!	<i>Leader: He o luo, the first!</i>
合: 嘢嗨! 隨倒, 隨倒, 隨倒.	<i>All: He hai! Go down, go down, go down.</i>
領: 哦咄羅一號!	<i>Leader: O yao luo, the first!</i>
合: 嘢嗨也也! 嘢一左! 嘢一左.	<i>All: He hai ye ye! He, to left! He, to left!</i>
領: 哦也哦也哥哦!	<i>Leader: O, ye, o, ye, ge, o!</i>
合: 嗨! 嘢一左, 哦一左, 哦一左.	<i>All: Hai! He, to left, O, to left, O, to left.</i>
領: 呃咄咄哦! 嗨, 嗨.	<i>Leader: E yao yao o! Hai, hai.</i>
合: 嗨, 嗨. [...]	<i>All: Hai, hai. [...].</i>

“走在深山雨要來” (*Zou zai shenshan yu yaolai*)

“Walking in the Mountain Depths When Rain Shall Come”<sup>330</sup>

To the unaccustomed these were just shouts and noises, perhaps a fair assessment, if we consider that the phrases above were screamed by hundreds of trackers. Supposedly they were loud enough to be heard above the roar of the Yangzi waters caught in the gorges and rolling down the rapids. The English traveler, Isabella Bird recalled crossing the Yangzi rapids with the following words:

[...] each [junk] with from 200 to 300 trackers, are all making the slowest possible progress, gongs and drums are beaten frantically; bells are rung; firearms are let off; the hundreds of trackers on all-fours are yelling and bellowing; the overseers are vociferating like madmen, and rush wildly along the gasping and struggling lines of

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<sup>330</sup> ZGYJC: 37.

naked men, dancing, howling, leaping, and thrashing them with split bamboos, not much to their hurt.<sup>331</sup>

Sometimes all the trackers were on the boat and all the sounds exploded much closer: “if tracking and sailing are both impossible, the trackers propel the junk by great oars, each worked by two men, twenty at a side, who face forwards, and mark time by a combined stamp and a wild chant.”<sup>332</sup>

What Western travelers experienced were not only the magnificent views of nature, or fascination at the skill of the boatmen, but also a unique soundscape that permeated both the immediate working environment and the surrounding natural world. As the physical geography of the rivers of Eastern Sichuan has been described multiple times, it is not necessary to address this here.<sup>333</sup> In contrast, the soundscape created by the boatmen has not been addressed in scholarship and requires research.<sup>334</sup> This chapter will provide a description and analysis of the sonic environment created by Eastern Sichuan boatmen, focusing exclusively on the musical quality of their songs in an attempt to understand them as constructive elements of the workers’ lives. Since the following chapters will deal with the meanings conveyed within the words of the work songs, this chapter will try to answer what meaning was transmitted through the songs’ sounds.

In the following pages, I will show how the river soundscape, as constituted by boatmen’s work songs, was perceived by its contemporaries. What do these work songs consist of from the ethno-musicological perspective and how have scholars attempted to understand them? How were the traditions formed and what shaped them? The social and natural environment, historical and linguistic conditions will be consecutively taken into consideration in an effort to provide a satisfactory description of the work songs (*haozi*) and people who performed them. Finally, we will look at what function they served in the boatmen’s work and within their society.

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<sup>331</sup> Bird: 147.

<sup>332</sup> Bird: 145.

<sup>333</sup> For some general characteristics see: Introduction and following bibliography in the footnotes.

<sup>334</sup> The concept of “soundscape” found recently its way into Chinese scholarship, as a borrowing from English made by Hong Kong musicologist Xue Yibing 薛藝兵. See: Wu Fan: 110.

## Soundscape

Qing literati were the first people clearly conscious of the unique soundscape of the Eastern Sichuan river land. While traveling through the Gorges to Chongqing they left extensive notes in the form of brief and witty verses – “bamboo branch poems.” These poems were widely practiced exercises in capturing the temporarily overwhelming impression experienced by the writer. These reminiscences are in many ways more complex than Western travel writing, as they often communicate the sophisticated perceptions and stereotypes of people intellectually (but not empirically) acquainted with Sichuan. The fusion of an *a priori* knowledge of the province (including its history, geography and traditions) combined with direct observation, produced a frequently romanticized vision of people’s lives on the river as well as of the sounds boatmen produced. There are, however, some notable exceptions. For our purposes, we can simplify and organize these records by dividing them into two groups. One expressed the beauty of the Sichuan soundscape, its romantic richness and omnipresence. The other revolted against its crudeness and vulgarity. All of them, however, offered a reading of Eastern Sichuan through its auditory qualities.

As early as the late seventeenth century, the labor and sorrow of the boatmen had become an observed phenomenon. Shi Weisong 石為崧 (fl. 1680s) saw boats rushing down river with flurrying sails as if they were huge birds, but plowing up stream like buffaloes:

巴水灣環作字流，布帆不掛往來舟。

下水舟輕疾於鳥，上水舟難慢似牛。<sup>335</sup>

*Waters of Ba draw a pictograph’s shape* [Ba means Chongqing, and also represents the city’s shape], *coming-up boats do not fly sails. Going downstream boats fly agilely like birds, going up boats plow slowly like oxen.*<sup>336</sup>

This movement was enveloped in a thick layer of sounds – the screams and calls of laboring rowers and trackers. Gong Weiha 龔維翰 (Qing, n.d.), while travelling on the rivers of

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<sup>335</sup> Zhuzhici: 529.

<sup>336</sup> All translations are my approximations meant to convey the meaning of the verses, not their lyric quality.

Sichuan, heard each day start with shouts and the beating of gongs, as miserable river workers jumped and ran in front of the prow:

雙日開頭喚扯篷，鳴鑼三轉又三通。

可憐橈絳諸夫子，足踏船頭便望風。<sup>337</sup>

*Even days start with calls to pull the sails; three by three gongs and whistles sound. All the miserable rowers and trackers, they toil in front of the prow against the wind.*

The association between shout and work was very powerful, as the river work was embedded in singing and singing was indistinguishable from the river. Gan Bingchang 甘丙昌 (fl. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, *juren* 舉人 1839) saw trackers tied to the boat as if they were playful strings of a musical instrument with beads attached to them and moved by the beating of the gong:

掛子船高夫絳多，珠帘綉柱響綁鑼。

滇黔几日銅鉛到，齊唱宏衣得寶歌。<sup>338</sup>

*A crowd of trackers pinned to the boat; they are like strings with beads moved by the sound of gong; lead and copper from Yunnan and Guizhou arrives in a few days, their magnificent singing equals a precious dress.*

Zhang Naifu 張乃孚 (1759-1825), an official and poet, while in Chongqing, connected river sounds not only to the work and the environment, but also to the anxiety and the danger that permeated the life of the boatmen. The unceasing din outside the city's gates was not a source of peace, but a disturbing reminder of the evil force inhabiting the oily waters of the Yangzi and Jialing:

朝天門外水如油，喚渡紛紛喚不休。

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<sup>337</sup> Zhuzhici: 526.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid: 555.

六七月間沙浪惡，紅心愁煞木蘭舟。<sup>339</sup>

*Outside Chaotianmen [Chongqing's city gate] the water is like oil, cries fly across the river without stop. In the sixth and seventh months waves [as large as] dunes rage, worryingly aiming their demonic force at magnolia boats.*

The screams of work, fear and effort were certainly not the only sounds filling the broad river banks of Chongqing and Sichuan. Zhang Naifu heard there much more: chants, local songs, calls of peddlers etc.:

雙江繞郭漫揚舲，解唱渝歌賈客聽。

誰畫東南山一角，朝來雨洗佛頭青。<sup>340</sup>

*The Twin Rivers slowly raise the houseboat as if it was an ancient vessel [dui 敦]; spreading the sound of Yu [Chongqing] songs sold to listening guests. Who paints South Western Mountain's horn [peak], will turn the rain to wash Buddha's emerald face.<sup>341</sup>*

It is almost surprising how similar these descriptions are to the one written a century later by an American doctor, George C. Basil, who seeing the same place, named it "the vortex" saying: "on the surface of the river floated countless craft down from inland towns. The boatmen, furling sails or poling a waterway path between wedged traffic, punctuated river chants by hurling good-natured curses at all in their way."<sup>342</sup>

Chinese literati saw, however, much more than just a 'playful' activity: the river's sounds were not monotonous or uniform, nor did they belong solely to the workers or work-time. After the working day, the river, its docks, harbors and beaches turned into places of entertainment and drunken rowdiness. Drinking was marked by singing and yelling, which to a refined ear sounded like village tunes and crude howls. Quarrelling boatmen simply added

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid: 530.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid: 530.

<sup>341</sup> Reference to *Xiyouji* 西游記 [Journey to the West]: 好雨！真個是：瀟瀟洒洒，密密沉沉。。。。。。滿地澆流鴨頂綠，高山洗出佛頭青。

<sup>342</sup> Basil: 222.

a primitive down-to-earth element, totally at odds with any notions of official elegance. That is how Gong Weihan noted down his impressions:

嘈雜鄉音入耳中，掌家籍貫半川東。

釐船鷄酒人人醉，一揖而來有太公。<sup>343</sup>

*A noisy tune enters the ear, clapping of native places in Eastern Sichuan. Quarrels of boatmen drunk with chicken wine. Bow with respect and come to your revered elders.*

Boat stations, whether permanent or makeshift, were especially rich in drunken singing and shouting, as trackers, rowers and sailors relaxed after a long day of exhausting effort, squandering their meager wages on wine. Hong Langpin has left us a typical picture of this process:

新灘灘子放船多，雪浪斜篙擲若梭。

穿過鷄心癩子石，得錢沽酒且高歌。<sup>344</sup>

*The new beach, boats moored by it, the crew, on snowy waves the slanting punt-poles seem like a weaver's shuttle. Crossing through the Chicken's Heart and the Leper [both names of rocks], [boatmen] lavish earned money on drink accompanying it with loud songs.*

Qing poet Zhang Zhou 張洲 (n.d.) had similar impressions about the boatmen, who, travelling on the interconnected waterways of Sichuan and passing multiple dangerous gorges, recuperated only by getting drunk:

巴峽巴城山互綿，綿江東下巴江連。

楚船一路逢灘惡，舟子停橈買醉眠。<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Zhuzhici: 526.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid: 525.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid: 532.

*Ba Gorges, Ba City Mountains extend unbroken, continuous waters of the Yangzi flow east from Ba. The boat from Chu [Hubei] encounters beaches and perils, when the boat stops [their] eyes are red from the drink they bought.*

Literary travelers not only recognized the ephemeral character of Sichuan songs, they also understood them as typically regional traditions, whose tunes they classified as Ba songs. Mention of Ba recalled a somewhat blurred knowledge of the ancient kingdom (8<sup>th</sup> century BCE – 316 BCE) centered in Chongqing, about which scant information existed in commonly read historical texts (such as the third century writings of Qiao Zhou, fourth century *Huayang guozhi* and fifth century *Hou Hanshu* 后漢書).<sup>346</sup> This earliest Sichuan gazetteer focused on Ba dances, which were seen as the origin of the particular regional music that permeated all activities of rural, urban and river life. Historians have also recognized that Ba dances occupied an important position in the court life of the Han Empire and exercised influence on the musical culture of the whole of Northern Asia.<sup>347</sup> Some contemporary musicologists still claim that Chongqing traditions have their origins in these ancient roots. From the perspective of the social, cultural and political history of the region this view cannot be supported as it takes no account of large scale developments in more than two millennia of Sichuan history.<sup>348</sup>

Such claims on the part of the Qing literati, although easy to discard now, showed sensitivity to the particular soundscape of the province – a world of sound which was indivisible from the activities of daily life, and which outsiders needed to master to merge with the local environment. In this context, Zhang Zhou wrote that the people of Hubei and Hunan – Chu, while traveling on or pulling boats into Sichuan all made efforts to memorize local tunes and song lines:

誰駕瓜皮城外過，楚人學唱巴渝歌。

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<sup>346</sup> Farmer: 121-143. Yang Ming 楊銘. 2000. *Xinan minzushi yanjiu* 西南民族史研究. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe: 85-86. For discussion of this issue see: Introduction.

<sup>347</sup> Kleeman: 45-46.

<sup>348</sup> See: Chen Zhengping 陳正平. 2001. *Baqu: Minjian wenxue yu minjian yanjiu* (Sichuansheng jiaoyuting wenkie zhongdian yanxiangmu) 巴渠: 民間文學與民間研究 (四川省教育廳文科重點科研項目), Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe: 140-141. For a discussion on that point see: Introduction.

絲聲幽咽才堪聽，一担醪糟渡小河。<sup>349</sup>

*Someone on a Peel [boat type] leaves the city, the people of Chu learn to sing songs of Ba Yu [Chongqing]. Silky sounds, listen without end to the murmuring of water, and undertake crossing the Little River [Jialing], turbid like a dirty wine.*

The Ba songs were not the sole property of the boatmen. They could apparently be heard in the fields coming from the mouths of village women, as was noted by Chen Xiangyi 陳祥裔 (n.d.):

梅子初黃落雨天，插秧婦女滿山田。

山歌唱出巴渝曲，交易工夫不用錢。<sup>350</sup>

*[When] plums turn yellow and rain falls, women weed mountain paddies. Singing mountain songs they sing Ba Yu tunes. Trading workmen do not need money.*

According to Zhang Zhou children running and playing on the streets of Chongqing were also well acquainted with the tunes, as songs spread from one generation to another:

千林翠筱竹鷄鳴，黃葛深陰濁酒傾。

一曲離歌人盡老，巴童閑唱過山城。<sup>351</sup>

*From a thousand emerald green bamboo trees [comes] the rooster's cry, from the deep darkness of yellow kudzu vines thick wine pours out. An old song leaves the lips of those who sing, children of Ba idly chant [it] running through the Mountain Town [Chongqing].*

As we can see, sounds were an indivisible part of the Eastern Sichuan human environment. They pervaded all activities of life and work. Their sometimes annoying omnipresence marked time and space, gave identity to people and the movements they made. They attracted and bound the insiders of the sound system or soundscape at the same time

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<sup>349</sup> Zhuzhici: 532.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid: 529.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid: 532.



frustrating and excluding those alien to it. All the authors quoted above seem to agree that, in spite of its very distinct social and cultural origins, such sound-making or music-making was not a lonely, individual activity; instead it belonged to the group. Sounds were exchanged and retained among performers. They belonged to them and their unique environment.

## The Form of Haozi

Three primary issues need to be addressed immediately when dealing with boatmen's *haozi*: style, sound, and rhythm. Firstly, similarly to a variety of Chinese traditions, *haozi* belonged to the antiphonal style, which Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender defined as: "[a] style, in which two or more singers 'talk' back and forth in song."<sup>352</sup> Within this type: "although terminology, line length, tunes, imagery, singing styles, and language differ [...], the basic call-and-response dynamic is consistent."<sup>353</sup> This form was not unique to Sichuan work songs or boatmen's *haozi*. Some songs, which have been classified as *haozi*, have a more 'conventional' form of rhymed stanzas sung solo, or at least, that is what we can infer from their structure. For reasons of consistency, as well as because of some controversies generated by this classification, we are going to treat these two types separately.

The extract opening this chapter, represents the 'conversational' quality apparent and in most cases defining the genre of Sichuan work songs. In short, such song was an exchange between the leading voice (*ling* 領) and a 'choir' or answering voices (*he* 合). We can imagine that the leading tracker was thus opening each part, with the others giving the response. The level of complication, both vocal and textual differed from song to song, but the structure remained largely unaltered. To illustrate it with a simple example, we turn here to a popular tradition called 鬧岩灣 (Naoyan wan), "Noisy Rocky Harbor":<sup>354</sup>

繚頭：抬頭望。

*Head: Raise heads up.*

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<sup>352</sup> Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender. 2011. *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature*. New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press: 91.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid: 91.

<sup>354</sup> ZGYJC: 42-43.

緯尾：嗨! <sup>355</sup>	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：把坡上.	<i>Head: Up the slope.</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：大彎子.	<i>Head: Big turns.</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：九十個.	<i>Head: Ninety of them.</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：前松後緊!	<i>Head: Forward pines, back hold tight.</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：腰桿使勁!	<i>Head: Support with all your strength!</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：司到!	<i>Head: Hold!</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：扯到!	<i>Head: Pull!</i>
緯尾：嗨!	<i>Tail: Hai!</i>
緯頭：隻會號子不合腳.	<i>Head: Only 'haozi' can fit in.</i>
緯尾：嗨着!	<i>Tail: Haizhe!</i>

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<sup>355</sup> Although given with exclamation mark, 'hai' is a syllable pronounced with a first tone (dark level tone), a rather slow, long, and flat sound. The exclamation mark denotes here a loud response.

緯頭：爬岩跳坎各照各。 *Head: Climb cliffs, jump ridges, one cares for the other.*

緯尾：嗨着！ *Tail: Haizhe!*

This musically and textually rather uncomplicated Yangzi tracker song functioned as a conversation between the leading trackers (head) and those who were at the back of the group pulling a vessel. “The head” signals a line and rhythm to which comes the response of “the tail” – in this way a group is integrated through a single system of communication expressed through a song. The “head” corresponded to a worker leading a group of trackers on land, or rowers on the boat. There is no indication that such a leader had a higher status or a decisive, better remunerated position among his co-workers. Rather, he was simply a person of outstanding vocal abilities, which granted him this position in his work-teams. The outstanding, trained voices of the “head” trackers/rowers find confirmation in the recordings made by Fritz Weiss in 1912.<sup>356</sup>

“The head” and “the tail” mostly did not chant the same verses, even if responses simply amounted to repeating the exclamations (he, hai, yao etc.) in unison. Much more often, each of them had separate roles to perform. This enabled the realization of one of the primary functions such songs had, namely organizing the rhythm of work by manipulating the rhythm of movement between a “head,” and a “tail.” Additionally, the exclamatory sounds alternated with lines conveying short statements, jokes, or pieces of stories all sung by the “head”/leading voice. Those were answered by the “tail”/answering voices, usually with a monosyllable that did not add anything to the story told by the leader. Looking at “Noisy Rocky Harbor” we can see how such songs worked in principle. There were, however, significant differences based on musical, functional, regional, or even environmental origins.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv Walzensammlungen. 1912. Sammlungsname: Weiss China; Sammler: Weiss, Friedrich; Aufnahmeort(e): Chengtu, Szechuan; Region: W.-China; Ethnie(n): div.; Inhalt: Rudergesänge, Jagdrufe, Soldatenlieder; Anzahl: 9.

<sup>357</sup> *Sichuansheng zhi*: 621. The same principle has been recognized also for other team workers’ songs, see: Bai Huang. “Haozi – Working Cries Turned into Art: A Discussion of Two Shanghai Work Song,” *CHIME*, No. 5 (Spring, 1992): 42-49.

For this reason we need to pay closer attention to the richness of exclamations, yells and calls employed by the singers. Most of them were not onomatopoeic, or in any manner trying to emulate sounds of the natural world. Their vocalizations possessed instead their own system of expressivity and logic of ordering. Yet, although evidence of this is scant, singers also employed their voices to reproduce nature. Among seven Chongqing *haozi* recorded by Fritz Weiss, one starts with more than twenty-second-long section of howling; this according to him resembled the wind blowing in the sail. This sound was obtained by hitting one's mouth with the palm of the hand, producing a tremolo (trembling, vibrating sound effect).<sup>358</sup> Weiss claimed, presumably after questioning the singers, that these sounds had the function of calling the wind, in order to ease the toil of rowing down-river. Since we do not have much more evidence of such usage of exclamations it is impossible to do more than just indicate certain interpretations. It seems that some sounds could have a role, through mirroring natural sounds, in evoking or altering certain responses in nature. Functioning as prayers or spells, belief in them may have been a way to ensure the boatmen's dominion and control over the environment. This point is unfortunately highly speculative and for lack of proof we need to leave it here.

We are on much more solid ground with the exclamations that did not resemble nature in any respect. The most common utterance of *haozi* singers was certainly the response '*hai*' sung by the so-called "tail". The introductions, interjections and endings could, however, be much more varied. In the example opening this chapter, there were more than 7 diverse sounds in various combinations, employed solely to open singing communication. One of the most spectacular of such openings was recorded for the documentary movie on *haozi* in 2001 titled *Boating-Songs [sic!] of Chuan Jiang River* 川江號子, which lasts for more than two and a half minutes.<sup>359</sup> The song was sung by four retired trackers, yet most of the

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<sup>358</sup> Walze 4, "Rufen (Locken) des Windes, Hissen der Segel", Neue Kopie, Band 1, ID 4, 02:31 min, 162 U/min, Übertragen am: 05.05.99. N. B. „Wenn die Leute wegen Windstille rudern müssen, wird der Wind durch Pfeifen usw. herbeigerufen; sobald er kommt wird das Segel gehisst. Manchmal wird durch Schlagen mit der Hand auf den Mund ein Tremolo erzeugt." Westchinesische Phonogramme, aufg. V. Herrn Konsul WEISS, Chengtu, Szechuan, 1912. Phonogram-Archiv Berlin.

<sup>359</sup> The title has a lot of elegance in its Chinese rendition, yet the given translation is marked by pitiful redundancy: Sichuan means Four Rivers. The recording took place in Pingshan Town 屏山镇 (Sichuan Province, Pingshan County 四川省屏山縣, around 360 km south of Chengdu) located on Jinsha River 金沙江 in January 2001. Jinsha River is linked to the revolutionary tradition of the Long March. That largely explains the reason for making the movie as an exemplification of popular culture adopting and celebrating official Communist

singing was performed by the leader, Jiang Jinlu 江進祿, at that time a 60 year old man, who on finishing his work on the river, acquired national and to a degree international recognition as one of the most talented *haozi* singers.<sup>360</sup> The piece commences with a simple phrase: hei, hou, hou (嘿嚀嚀) answered by hai. Then the leading voice adds more complicated sections: yao, hei, hai, lou, yao, luo (吆嘿嗨羅吆羅); hai (嗨); yao, hei, hai, luo, yao, wei, luo, ai, luo, yao (吆嘿嗨羅吆喂羅哎羅吆). The pace increases and turns into a furious refrain repeated more than eleven times: yao, hei, wei, luo, yao (吆嘿喂羅吆) which alternates with equally swift answers from the other singers (hai). Suddenly the flurry of sounds ceases and a calm wo, wo (喔喔) brings rest, which is followed by a slow section that finishes the introduction. Such spectacular openings were not the only moments when unarticulated sounds substituted for words. They could also come in the middle of the song, depending on the structure of it or conditions when it was sung. The unarticulated vocal sections also signaled a change of pace or the end of the articulated poetic parts. Weiss's recordings provide us with ample evidence of that. The only two songs that have a text (records 1 and 7) all start with introductory sections; after finishing the text-based section the "head" led through another unarticulated part to a much faster chanted part.<sup>361</sup> Some songs did not contain any words, but just sequences of exclamations, which were regularly

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discourse – the first song of the movie depicts the heroic efforts of the Red Army fording Jinsha River. Other songs, however, have more traditional content originating in popular operas. The movie was financed through a "Mountain Flower Prize" (Shanhuajiang 山花獎) awarded by the 4<sup>th</sup> National Meeting on the Folklore Culture, (disijie Zhongguo minjian wenyi 第四屆中國民間文藝. Producers: Liu Chuanping 劉川平 and Zheng Liujun 鄭柳君. Available also on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=THJiApJQq28> (1<sup>st</sup> part: "The Source" 源頭 yuantou); [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd\\_andY1KUK&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd_andY1KUK&feature=related) (2<sup>nd</sup> part: "All his Life" 生平 shengping); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPNJX8dvHg0&feature=related> (3<sup>rd</sup> part: "Change" 變遷 qian bianqian); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNtXGBmbJ9I&feature=related> (4<sup>th</sup> part: "Recollections" 回憶 huiyi); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epKbcU6mCtU&feature=related> (5<sup>th</sup> part: "Crossing the Sea," 過海 guohai) ).

<sup>360</sup> Due to his fame Jiang Jinlu gained a reputation as the "king of haozi" (號子大王). Other singers performing for the documentary: Liu Yukun 劉玉昆, Hu Zeming 胡澤明, Huang Jinhua 黃金華. More information on these worker-artists look: <http://www.yb.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/zgyb/ptpxw/200709/230011.htm>.

<sup>361</sup> Walze 1, Beim Stromabwärts-Rudern, Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 1. 02.20 min, 165 U/min; Übertragen am: 05.05.99. Walze 7, Beim Rudern im stillen Wasser. Vorsänger mit Chor. (Der Voränger improvisiert, anknüpfend am eine Tagesbegebenheit), Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 7, ? min, 164 U/min, Übertragen am: 05.05.99. Weiss recordings.

interrupted, whether to restore or change the pace, by a more elaborate utterance by the lead singer.<sup>362</sup>

We need to note as well, although it was basically a rule that “head” and “tail” sang different phrases, this did not mean that their parts were not uttered at the same time. Especially in case of songs with a very fast tempo, or when the tempo changed abruptly, both vocal lines would be sung at the same time.<sup>363</sup> The effect produced by such singing was particularly striking, and must have had a strong impact on laboring boatmen.

The usage and context of *haozi*, however, requires further discussion. Jiang Jinlu claimed that exchanging calls was a way of communicating between the boat and the trackers. The helmsmen of the ferry usually took the lead voice while the trackers followed. The same logic can be traced in the historical accounts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Notable traveler, Isabella Bird recorded that: “The [...] trackers are usually on shore hauling, being directed from the junk either by flag signals or drum beat, under the *tai-kung’s* direction. [...] [The trackers] mark time by a combined stamp and wild chant.”<sup>364</sup> A few years before Archibald Little observed that “trackers [...] are directed by beat of drum, the drummer remaining on board under the direction of the helmsman.”<sup>365</sup>

We can infer that the usage of sounds or “chants” was a method of communication, essential for work in which there was neither time nor possibility for taking observations or procrastination in decision-taking. Even more, this mode of communication seems to have been entirely integrated with the tasks and indivisible from them. With some caution we can interpret in this manner the comments of another British traveler, William Spencer Percival: “[...] they [Szechuen/Sichuan boatmen] cannot do a single thing requiring some extra exertion without an extraordinary amount of shouting and yelling.”<sup>366</sup> Interestingly, the scale of the boat mattered and whereas vocal calls alone sufficed on smaller vessels, the larger ones employed certain elementary (and effective) instruments. Among those, special position was taken by drums and gongs whose sound could pierce through the roar of water

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<sup>362</sup> Walze 2, Forts. V 1) Beim Ueberschreiten der Stromschnellen (Seitenruder), Neue Kopie, Band 1, ID 2, 02.23 min, 165 U/min; Übertragen am: 05.05.99. Weiss recordings.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid: op.cit.

<sup>364</sup> Bird: 145.

<sup>365</sup> Little: 111.

<sup>366</sup> William Spencer Percival. 2010 (1889). *Land of the Dragon: My Boating and Shooting Excursions to the Gorges of the Upper Yangtze*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 111.

in the Gorges.<sup>367</sup> In other cases, singing alone was enough to ensure communication among trackers who were sometimes spread out over a large distance.<sup>368</sup>

Contrary to what the travelers perceived, the vocalizations of the trackers were not chaotic or random. Rather, they were uttered in complex rhythmical patterns dependent on a variety of conditions. Trackers' *haozi* were entirely unmelodic and they could hardly be reproduced outside their primary function of boat-pulling work. Why a particular form of song was used can only be explained through an enquiry into when it was sung. Obviously most of the lyrics could be quite easily adjusted to different situations and consequently different rhythms, in effect producing a different song. Listening to the words of Jiang Jinlu, it appears that the Pingshan 屏山 *haozi* had two types – one with a fast rhythm for pulling the boat against the current; another with longer intervals for rowing it downstream.<sup>369</sup> Rhythm, the most important formal characteristic of *haozi*, also shaped the songs and gave them a frame on which, in various situations, the content was imprinted. As in the example given above (*Noisy Rocky Harbor*) we can see that short phrases followed by immediate response gave a fast pace, which can be related to the exhausting climb against the current. In Weiss's recordings we can also hear that such short phrases could overlap one another encouraging an even more concentrated common effort from the boatmen.

## Classification of Sichuan Haozi

More recently, faced with such variety, Chinese musicologists have produced increasingly sophisticated classifications of *haozi*, which not only incorporate their regional characteristics (differentiated on the basis of the main river valleys of Sichuan), but also their direct function (going with or against the current). This latter point has been corroborated by differentiated analysis of utterance tempo.

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<sup>367</sup> "No description can convey any idea of the noise and turmoil of the Hsin-tan. I realized it best by my hearing being affected for some days afterwards. The tremendous crash and roar of the cataract, above which the yells and shouts of hundreds of straining trackers are heard, mingled with the ceaseless beating of drums and gongs, some as signal, others to frighten evil spirits, make up a pandemonium which can never be forgotten." Bird: 127.

<sup>368</sup> Percival: 95. On Chongqing river movement and trackers: "Favoured by a fine fresh up-river breeze, the quaintly shaped junks, each with a single square-cut bellying main-sail, make almost imperceptible progress against the rapid stream. Though under sail, they are still attached by a invisible thread to the shore, and a gang of trackers, ascending and descending the rocky path along the slope of the ravine, may just be traced about a quarter of a mile ahead of each toiling craft." Little: 245-246.

<sup>369</sup> "Chuanjiang haozi": part 2.

It seems that there has never been full agreement among specialists as to the number of regional *haozi*. The differentiation proposed tended to depend on where a particular tradition was collected rather than a more sophisticated classification expounding musical and textual differences. Nevertheless, we can see that songs differed to a degree from one river valley to another, since each of them presented different natural conditions and was inhabited and worked upon by a fairly consistent group of workers. With these principles in mind, scholars identified Wujiang River songs (*Wujiang haozi*, 烏江號子, flowing from Guizhou north to Sichuan and joining the Yangzi in Fuling 涪陵, west of Chongqing);<sup>370</sup> Jialing River songs (*Jialing haozi* 嘉陵號子, the river joining the Yangzi in Chongqing); Chuanjiang songs (*Chuanjiang haozi*, 川江號子—referring to the Yangzi downriver from Chongqing).<sup>371</sup> Occasionally, other types were also proposed, such as the above-mentioned Pingshan songs, Jinsha songs, or Nanguanghe songs representing the upper reaches of the Yangzi in southern Sichuan with its tributaries.<sup>372</sup>

Better informed divisions have taken into consideration the direct function of songs integrating them with extant texts and modes of chanting. Scholars preparing the 2000 *Sichuan Gazetteer on Popular Customs* (*Sichuansheng zhi: minsuzhi*) followed this idea by proposing a complex system of *haozi* classification. The songs were broken into two groups – with river current and against river current. In the former group there were six types.

1. “Rising oar songs” (起桡號子 *qirao haozi*), motivated the oarsmen to harder work.

They took the following sequence: leader: “wohe 喔嚒!” Answer: “wohe 喔嚒!”

Leader: “wowoai 喂喂唉!” Answer: “wohe 喔嚒!” The song had a very powerful and loud sound.

<sup>370</sup> Deng Guanghua 鄧光華. “Wujiang chuanguong haozi yanjiu” 烏江船工號子研究, *Zhongguo yinyue* 中國音樂 No. 4 (1989): 22-25.

<sup>371</sup> The *chuanjiang haozi* were the earliest identified and studied by scholars; see: Tao Peng 陶鵬. “‘Chuanjiang chuanfu haozi’ shuoming” “川江船夫號子”說明, *Renmin yinyue* 人民音樂, No. 4 (1951): 44-49.

<sup>372</sup> Deng Xiao 鄧曉. “Chuanjiang haozi de wenhua neihan” 川江號子的文化內涵, *Zhongguo wenhua luntan* 中華文化論壇, No. 1 (2005): 17-18.



2. "Directing a strike songs" (指架號子 *zhijia haozi*) were sung while speed-rowing through the main current or passing the beachheads. It allowed for inclusion of other songs and stories within its basic sonic frame. The sequence was: leader: "yamohe (he: long) 呀莫嘞!" Answer: "hai 嗨!" Leader: "yamohaima 呀莫嗨么!" Answer: "hai 嗨!" The leader's sequences could be more prolonged also turning into utterances like: "yahainadayo – yahainata – yamoyamohaimo 呀嗨那他哟 ——呀嗨那他—— 呀莫呀莫嗨莫!" Answer: "hai 嗨!" Irrespective of length the last "mo 莫" always coincided with the oars hitting the water.
3. "Grab, grab songs" (抓抓號子 *zhuazhua haozi*) were sung in moments of utmost danger, when much force was required in short periods of time. The leader yelled: "luohe 囉嘞!" Answer: "di 抵!" Etc.
4. "Big turtledove songs" (大斑鳩號子 *dabanjiu haozi*) called also "one, two, three songs" (么二三號子 *yaoersan haozi*). These would be chanted at dangerous confluences involving several streams or while crossing the rapids. The most rudimentary calls were as follows. Leader: "wodezuo 喔得左!" Answer: "wodezuo 喔得左!" The structure allowed the interpolation of fairly long phrases of other songs, stories or opera pieces thus often turning these songs into elaborate pieces.
5. "Giving rhythm songs" (訴板號子 *suban haozi*) were initiated after passing a treacherous stretch of water and usually followed "big turtledove songs." They were meant to slow down the pace of rowing and allow some respite to the workers. The call for starting this song was the leader's line: "ya – yahea 呀——呀嘞啊!" This piece formed a bridge between the previous "big turtledove song" and the start of a new one. It was answered by a long "hai – hei 嗨——嘿!", which signaled slowing the rowing tempo by half. The form of "giving rhythm song" enabled the inclusion of long stanzas sung in diverse regional opera style which was very popular in Sichuan "high voice" (高腔 *gaoqiang*). All the transfers between song types were controlled

by the last pair of rowers (so called *mamen* 馬門) who reacted and signaled changing river conditions.

6. “Following wave tails songs” (連巴浪號子 *lianbalang haozi*) or “opium bubble songs” (煙泡號子 *yanpao haozi*) were sung in fairly relaxed conditions when no danger was in sight. It had the following pattern: leader: “hailayo 嗨拉哟! Haila 嗨拉!” Answer: “hai 嗨! Hai 嗨!” Another alternative was: leader: “henglayo 橫拉哟! Shunla 順拉! Yaheahaila 呀嗬啊嗨拉!” Answer: “hai 嗨!”<sup>373</sup>

The up-river songs, although having often similar names, corresponded with the entirely different labor of pulling the boat and rowing against the current. Their sound and functions thus had only a superficial relation to the down-river *haozi*. Musicologists have identified five types of such songs:

1. “One, two, three songs” (幺二三號子 *yaoersan haozi*) usually followed a period of intensive towing, when relieved trackers chanted such lines as: leader: “ya – ya (we) took it (naxialai) 呀——呀拿下來!” Answer: “hai 嗨!” Leader: “ya – ya arrived (daoxialai) 呀——呀到下來!” Answer: “hai 嗨!” If the way was rough and stones precluded keeping the same pace for a whole team, this song would resemble the following: Leader: “ya ... ya climb, move (pahuo) 呀——呀爬活!” Answer: “wohai 喔嗨! Wozha 嘿扎! Wozha 嘿扎!” Leader: “ya ... ya climb to break! (padetuo) 呀——呀爬得脫!” Answer: “wohai 喔嗨! Woya 嘿呀! Woya 嘿呀!”
2. “Small turtledove songs” (小斑鳩號子 *xiaobanjiu haozi*) were mostly chanted in three situations: pulling across a long shoal, towing against a rapid or approaching a dock or landing place. Since all these activities demanded exerting additional effort the song would also be intensive, consisting of short phrases. These songs could resemble military marches. Example: leader: “ya ... ya, pull more (*louyixia*) yo 呀——呀, 撿一下哟!” Answer: “wohai 喔嗨! Pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀! Pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀!”

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<sup>373</sup> *Sichuansheng zhi*: 621-622.

Pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀!” Leader: “yahe! ... all brothers pull once more (*zhongjia xiongdi zai lou yixia*) 呀嘞! ——眾家兄弟再撿一下!” Answer: “pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀! Pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀! Pulling (*che*) ya 扯呀!” All manner of variations on these lines existed. Another typical trait of these songs was intoning repetitively at a rapid pace: “wozou 喔左!”

3. “Giving rhythm songs” (訴板號子 *suban haozi*) were usually commenced at the end of the “small turtledove songs” while on the ascent up the river rapid. These traditions enabled the inclusion within a simple frame of repetitive “hai 嗨” adapted by the answering group, a whole range of stories, poems and operas. *Sichuan Gazetteer on Popular Customs* gives an example of such a story: “Boat reaches beachhead, waterway lies open; his highness Bodhisattva Wang Ye wants the riches. If you want wealth for yourself, protect the boat when it climbs a rapid! (船到灘頭水路開, 王爺菩薩要錢財, 你要錢財給與你, 保佑船舟上灘來! *Chuan dao tantou shuilu kai, wangye pusa yao qiancai, niyao qiancai gei yu ni, baoyou chuanzhou shang tan lai!*)”
4. “Moving mountain songs” (抬山號子 *taishan haozi*) were sung when trackers were faced with mountainous tracks or up bigger boulders, which required them to move on hands and feet and grab any stone available. Sometimes, if the ground was unstable or consisted of sand the difficulty of work could be great. Its sequence went as follows. Leader: “yamoheyo 呀莫嘮啣! Yawai 呀歪 [low voice] yaye 呀也!” Answer: “ye 也! Ye 也! Ye 也!” When the current brought the boat to a standstill against all efforts, the trackers set up the following rhythm to keep them motivated and maximize the force of their communal exertions. Leader: “Yawai 呀歪 [high voice] ... wai rise ya ——歪起呀! Rise (*qi*) ya 起呀! Rise (*qi*) ya 起呀!”
5. This specific type of “one, two, three songs” (幺二三號子 *yaoersan haozi*) was sung while towing on a particularly rugged and unfriendly river shoal, when trackers were towing against a fast current and having problems in maintaining a unified pace. It

started with an intensive yell of the leader, accenting and prolonging the last syllable: “climb ... move (*pa ... huo*) 啊爬——活!” Answer: “wo ... hai, haiya 喔——嗨, 嗨呀! Heiya 嘿呀! Heiya 嘿呀!” Alternatively: “heizuo 嘿左!” An alternative typical sequence was: leader: “yi ... ya pull and move (*padetuo*) 意——呀爬得脱!” Answer: “wo ... hai 喔——嗨! Heizuo 嘿左! Heizuo 嘿左!”

6. Additional types popular in Western Sichuan such as “haozi of river Fu” (府河船工號子 *Fuhe chuangong haozi*) etc.<sup>374</sup>

Obviously, such detailed classification of genre subtypes, as any other, contains within itself an element of fallacy – *haozi* were work songs easing the burden of labor, helping to maintain regular breathing and pace. They were not artistic forms *per se*, which would include refinement and mastership of various voices in order to succeed in the performance of particular pieces. This role has been bestowed on *haozi* only in the last three decades (this process accelerated from the mid-1980s on) and has most unfortunately attracted excessive attention from scholars asserting the ethnographic purpose of their undertaken study.

Nevertheless, we can still find such information very useful. Firstly, boatmen’s and trackers’ work songs were evidently very sophisticated and flexible tools of work. They allowed for quick adjustments to the changing conditions of the work environment. This effect was obtained through manipulation of voice and of pace, uttered in unison both by the leading individual and by the group. As we can clearly see from the division presented in the *Sichuan Gazetteer on Popular Customs*, to achieve this effect, boatmen utilized a very extensive range of vocalizations specific to each situation and thus to each type of *haozi*. The examples above also show that exclamations were not the sole content of work songs; the same function was obtained with elements of narratives, short sentences, jokes, etc. also inserted to let the song flow continuously.

Secondly, voices also interacted with other sounds produced to enhance work. As is recorded in travelers’ accounts, the singing was supported with instruments, gun shots and

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid: 622-624. Much more sophisticated classifications, following a similar path, have been proposed by Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng who also incorporated narrative genres sung in the ‘frame’ of *haozi*: *Chuan*: 113-326

obviously even more furious screaming. From the perspective of the presented evidence, it would be hard to claim that, from the musical point of view, there existed in Sichuan distinctive local ways of singing. Rather we see a fairly broad musical tradition related to managing the dangerous conditions of river labor. Their performance or entertainment value was limited by the very work environment, of which they were both a product and a producer.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the categorizations above point to the variety of local *haozi* created to address the specific conditions of each river. If the structure of songs can be generalized for our theoretical discussion, the songs themselves cannot, as they were ephemeral entities meant to tackle the situation at hand. The division into up and down river musical sub-genres has to be enriched also by another division according to the particular water way. In other words, as outlined by Duan Ming and Hu Tianchang the songs from, for example, the Wu River, Jialing River or Pingshan area differed to a considerable extent, as each of them was confined to a unique environment.<sup>375</sup> These differences did not, however, challenge the defining patterns of Eastern Sichuan boatmen's work songs – an antiphonal structure with the division into two voices, differences between up and down river songs, extensive usage of rhythmic vocalizations, incursions of narratives within the unarticulated utterances, and quickly changing rhythmic structure. Apart from that, the minor regional divisions in fact applied to certain unique musical qualities of *haozi*, and much less to their content. As is going to be apparent in the following chapters, boatmen (as a professional group) shared a common culture beyond the narrow confines of their locality.

Finally, although the evidence is extremely scanty, we can infer that *haozi*, understood as a particular formal genre of songs, were used by the boatmen also for entertainment or during celebrations. We have one song of that kind – a Dragon Boat Festival *haozi* recorded by Fritz Weiss. This song is structurally identical to other work songs, but with a difference in content and tone. It is in fact a drinking song, where instead of *hai* we can hear *he, he, heyibei* 喝, 喝, 喝一杯, which means "Drink, drink, drink a cup [of wine]."<sup>376</sup> It is hard to state anything conclusive here, but we can suggest that boatmen, being very well trained in the work songs

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<sup>375</sup> Chuan: op. cit.

<sup>376</sup> Walze 5, Gesang der Ruder auf dem Drachenboot (Boote zum Drachenfest, die mit kurzen Rudern vorwärts gestossen werden), Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 5, 02:17 min, 163 U/min, Übertragen am: 05.05.99. Weiss recordings.

and being deeply attached to their sound, did not hesitate to use them in other situations. Obviously, boatmen were not isolated from other forms of songs, which were sung mostly for entertainment. Those such as love songs or popular opera tunes had individual melodies based on rhyming verses and did not depend on exclamations as the songs described above.<sup>377</sup> Nevertheless, phrases and tunes from such songs could be incorporated within the *haozi* sung during work time.<sup>378</sup> There is, however, insufficient evidence to develop this subject further.

## Communication and Survival

As has been demonstrated above, sounds (whether songs, exclamations or yells) were one of the most characteristic and significant elements of Eastern Sichuan culture. We have also seen that they formed a unique and complex system that coexisted with all the professional activities of workers involved in transportation. The following section will propose a discussion of *haozi* as an indivisible element of the culture of trackers' and rowers' work; an element, which sprang out of and enabled the very performance of this type of labor. Following the discussion, I will provide a short critique based on the view of cultural traditions as seen through the prism of performance theory.

Our focus on the songs and their unique form allows us to discern the origins and functions of this particular tradition seen through the context of the work environment. Two functions of *haozi* seem to have been of the highest importance: communication and protection. Communication functioned according to the requirements of a particular task, and texts of songs have to be seen through the specific context of their use. The presented examples of boatmen's songs involved a fairly small, but extended group of trackers, who needed to maintain an equal rhythm of pulling. The song operates with short phrases alternating with an abrupt response not allowing for much variation in the sung lines. The pulsating voice of the workers performing this song allowed the movement to be harmonized to a regular, rapid rhythm. Was this song then necessary for the undertaking of pulling the boat? Could it not have been substituted with for example, a drum? From the majority of the accounts on trackers' work, we do not have evidence of widespread usage of instruments outside bigger

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<sup>377</sup> Scholars usually did not classify them among *haozi* but rather mountain songs *shan'ge* or love songs *qingge*.

<sup>378</sup> That was indicated by Shen Congwen, 1960: 13-14.

vessels. Crews and trackers of smaller units (whether boats or ferries)<sup>379</sup> could simply rely on their voices to regulate their pace of work.<sup>380</sup> Indeed, even for the smallest boats there were at least three elements to coordinate: trackers spread out over a large distance, helmsmen trying to keep the boat off rocks and sand bars, and the pilot observing the river bottom. Larger units, apart from a much larger number of trackers also had oarsmen who needed to row in harmony with other parts of the crew.

The specific morphology of the Yangzi and its seasonal changeability meant that rarely could any tasks simply be approached with unvarying regularity. On the contrary, we need to search for the trackers' active involvement in the organization and performance of their work. In other words, the pilots and helmsmen often had limited control over their vessels and were not able to observe everything, thus the signaling provided by the leading trackers could be equally important for a successful voyage. From that perspective we can understand the function of rhythmically complex and vocally rich *haozi*, which allowed for abrupt changes of meter, pace and tonal pattern of singing. Through these means leading trackers were able to direct and alter the movement of other workers engaged in boat-pulling. Communicating information about impending difficulties, speed of movement, and necessary effort required at a particular time or chosen route allowed harmonization of movement among a broadly spread group of trackers. This ultimately was the essential function of the trackers' song. Moreover, the song was constantly "traded" between groups of workers laboring concurrently on land, in the water, and on board the boat to the extent that all participants knew what the others were doing. The necessity of such communication can be easily observed by looking at the consequences of failure. The Yangzi, particularly the section between Yichang and Chongqing was densely dotted with fearful reminders of crashed boats, the camps of surviving crews and the debris of abandoned merchandise spat out by the river.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ferries in Chongqing were usually small boats that could accommodate around a dozen passengers. The same can be said of other boats used for that purpose till full mechanization of river transport in Sichuan took place in the 1970s. As they were not propelled by an engine, or their engines had insufficient power to deal with fast currents, trackers were necessary to ensure the passage.

<sup>380</sup> "Chuanjiang haozi": part 2.

<sup>381</sup> Bird: 132, 147. Little: 111, 143-144. Steamers were also not immune to the dangers of Sichuan rivers. Woodhead: 40-45 and 72-79. Woodhead lists all accidents known to him that happened to Upper Yangzi steamers and consequent financial losses.

Yet we can see in *haozi* an even more essential element of Yangzi work culture – that of protection. The need for harmonized movement between every part of the engaged workforce did not solely serve the purpose of greater efficiency. The notion of efficiency, in its conventional sense of “effective operation as measured by a comparison of production with cost (as in energy, time and money)” was not of particular significance;<sup>382</sup> or at least was not treated as being of sufficient importance to be addressed in any of the accounts. In reality, it was the physical survival of the workers that remained a central function of these work songs, since the survival of workers and their cargo demonstrated the effectiveness of the performance of tracking or rowing on Eastern Sichuan’s rivers. “Survival” thus meant achievement or possession of sufficient tools to enable satisfactory work performance in these particularly difficult environmental (human and natural) conditions; lack of those would preclude any possibility of success in the activity, endangering the health and life of all those involved.<sup>383</sup> If we look at the circumstances in which trackers worked, the variety of difficulties and scale of the task they had to overcome, it will be apparent that the songs played an essential role in ensuring the successful accomplishment of their responsibilities.

Firstly, along most of the Yichang – Chongqing route (and on other shorter routes as well), trackers’ trails were simply narrow passages cut sometimes many meters above water level. These “goat roads” had to be negotiated by people with ropes strapped around their bodies that harnessed them to the boats. Any mistake or misjudgment could throw the boat back downstream pulling the trackers off their precarious paths into the abyss of the Yangzi valley.<sup>384</sup> Secondly, trackers were often scattered over a very large area, reaching up to half a kilometer. They could not see each other, either due to the distance or because many of them were pulling while moving on hands and feet. Nor did they have time to negotiate appropriate movement, since all their efforts were engaged in physical labor.<sup>385</sup> Thirdly, sometimes banal mistakes, on relatively easy sections, could be a source of physical injuries, sometimes serious enough to limit ability to perform subsequent work.<sup>386</sup> All these dangers

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<sup>382</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/efficiency>.

<sup>383</sup> Basic definition of survival: “the state or fact of continuing to live or exist, typically in spite of an accident, ordeal, or difficult circumstances”: <http://english.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival>.

<sup>384</sup> Bird: 147.

<sup>385</sup> Little: 111-112.

<sup>386</sup> “[...] the life of the tracker is in continual peril from losing his foothold owing to the slipperiness of the rock after rain, and from being dragged over and drowned by the backward tendencies of a heavy junk tugging at the end of 1200 feet of a heavy bamboo hawser as thick as an arm.” Bird: 131.



were avoidable only for well-harmonized and experienced teams, who had developed methods of coping with the environment and their own shortcomings. For the Yangzi trackers the way to achieve such a high level of cooperation was by developing this unique genre of songs, *haozi*, which allowed them to act together and avoid (more often than not) crippling injuries, or even deadly accidents.

Finally, we need to ask in what respect Eastern Sichuan *haozi* differed from other work songs, such as European sailor shanties. Part of the answer can be found in looking at the already analyzed formal characteristics. Trackers' and rowers' songs were involved in much more complex activity, had to maintain a broader range of rhythms and adjust to considerably greater changes than shanties. If we are to use a narrow definition of the shanty as a "verse set to a musical phrase [sung] to enable a party of men pulling at a rope to give a united effort" where "the pull comes upon the first note of the bar or upon that of every three or four bars, according to the exertion demanded"<sup>387</sup> the differences in form and function become more visible. Although shanties like boatmen's songs were primarily meant to aid labor, the former were used in much more unvaried tasks; additionally they were built upon a simple melody with constant repetition maintained as a means to ensure the united and simultaneous movement of a group of men. In contrast, *haozi* were by no means melodic, having rhythm as the sole method of sound organization. Moreover, their flexibility to various interpretations and rapid changes was congruent with the function of assisting the strenuous, but in no way repetitive task of hauling boats along the rocky shores of Sichuan's rivers. Apart from that, the uniqueness of trackers' songs has to be seen through the ends they served: as means of communication.

## Conclusion

The work songs of Eastern Sichuan boatmen created a distinctive and meaningful soundscape for the region. Travelers, poets, journalists and musicologists all observed and heard Sichuan rivers as realities governed and shaped by the sound of loud and powerful singing by workers engaged in strenuous labor. These sounds were not mere yells, but a complex system of communication that was intrinsically bound up with work. It allowed for

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<sup>387</sup> Frank Kidson. "Sailors' Songs: A Paper read before the Folk-Song Society, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1899," *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1900): 39.

the performance of demanding work and increased workers' safety by circulating necessary warnings, balancing and harmonizing movement, encouraging and motivating exertion in moments of difficulty, and signaling appropriate times for relaxation. Since further parts of this thesis will focus exclusively on the textual content of the songs, and the meanings created and sustained by the boatmen, we ought not to forget that these narrative practices were all transmitted within the musical frame of the *haozi*, in the work context. Singing and laboring, communicating cultural images and communicating the rhythm of work were indivisible within the *haozi*. The soundscape of the river work of Eastern Sichuan and the cultural world of the boatmen were in unity and thus the words of the songs should never be seen as mere texts that can be approached outside the specific environment of boatmen's work.

# **PART TWO: SOCIAL SPACES, WORK AND SELF-PERCEPTION**



# CHAPTER 4: MAPPING THE RIVER WORLD

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In the previous chapter, we have seen to what extent an ability to sing, manipulate the voice and adjust it to both pace of movement and the external environment was essential for the performance of river work in Sichuan. Vocal communication and pacing work through singing were only part of the skills of trackers and boatmen. This physical ability exercised in the challenging work environment, though essential, should also be seen as one of the complementary elements of their professional skills. The success of individuals, groups, if not the whole profession in performing river work was equally dependent on knowledge inscribed in, transferred by, and repeated within the oral traditions that constituted an indivisible element of their culture and of their work. This included knowledge of Sichuan's complex river system, notorious for its gorges, rapids, submerged rocks and sandbars, as well as knowledge of cities and local urban centers, important for boatmen as places of residence, socialization and most of all, work. This knowledge was reproduced through conscious training of memory skills coded within the songs.

*Haozi*, however, were not simply 'data banks' on which boatmen could draw for their needs. Each chunk of information was also a representation of reality created by the boatmen according to rules drawn from their cultural milieu. My claim is that through songs Sichuan river workers 'appropriated' the world they lived and worked in. This claim finds support in the insight provided by Michel de Certeau on the way a pedestrian uses urban space:

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to the language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple "enunciative" function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic "contracts" in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation tracts between interlocutors into action).<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> De Certeau: 97-98.

Necessarily, this chapter will at once extend and narrow down de Certeau's perspective. Within the realm of boatmen's songs we can engage with their movements only to the extent that they deemed them worthy of remembrance, reproduction and eventual transmission to ethnographers. On the other hand, the space of boatmen was not only that of the city, but of a whole province. Through *haozi* we can see beyond the urban space, concurrently having an opportunity to appreciate points of convergence and dissimilarity between these two environments.

Peeking into the world depicted in boatmen's work songs gives us a chance to understand one more essential issue. Songs contained what their singers found important, remarkable, fascinating and entertaining. They also spelled out elements they deemed valuable and meaningful. Without an exaggerated claim of a comprehensive understanding, we can nevertheless, by looking at the emerging picture, observe the divergence between the cultural realms occupied by river workers and the upper classes. We can determine which elements intersected and which were alien to elites, providing for different needs and aesthetics.

### **Mental Mapping, Memory and Sichuan *Haozi***

Sichuan boatmen could not rely on any graphic representation of their world. As the vast majority of them were illiterate any textual description would have been neither accessible nor comprehensible. Although it seems implausible to claim that no form of graphic mapping existed, any such documents have perished either due to difficulties in preservation or their makeshift character. To my knowledge no such material exists in any of the collections.<sup>389</sup> The only regional maps that exist for Eastern Sichuan, all providing considerable detail, appear to be imperially or officially commissioned documents meant for restricted circulation, produced and preserved only in unique copies.<sup>390</sup> On the other hand a large number of mind maps – mnemonic tools created for remembering and navigating in space transferred orally and in form of songs provide evidence that lower class mapping in Sichuan

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<sup>389</sup> I am referring here especially to the collections of the Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing (重慶三峽博物館, Chongqing Sanxia Bowuguan) which has a section exclusively devoted to Eastern Sichuan boatmen; for an overview see: <http://www.3gmuseum.cn/index.asp>. Nor were any such artifacts mentioned or collected by travelers to the region or are in possession of related ethnographic museums; ex. Fritz Weiss's collection in Berlin Ethnographic Museum (Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz) consists only of song recordings.

<sup>390</sup> For more detail on regional mapping, see: *Lao Ditu*.

was based on oral arts rather than graphic representations. The traditions of Sichuan, however, do not require any particular mental abilities.

According to Geoff King, mapping is among the basic cognitive abilities of human beings – as maps “at the cultural level [...] are invariably used to impose meaning on the world.” King concluded that with mental maps “Otherwise bewilderingly complex and unwieldy masses of phenomena are carved up into manageable portions through the imposition of various grids like those used to map a territory, grids that create the reality they often appear merely to represent.”<sup>391</sup> Further, King claimed that “language is among the most powerful of these mappings” with different languages allowing and creating different systems of meanings and different codes of personal and group experiences. The language thus becomes dominant over territory: “the linguistic grid becomes sedimented into experience, taken to be an objective map of a prior reality rather than an arbitrary imposition.”<sup>392</sup> Linguistic particularity enforces the arbitrariness of each form of mapping, yet such maps, though always provisional, are mostly perceived as being objective, as existing in the real world and being reality.<sup>393</sup>

Mental maps are constructed on the basis of cognitive memory. Concerning cognitive memory Paul Connerton stated that: “what this type of remembering requires is, not that the object of memory be something that is past, but that the person who remembers that thing must have met, experienced or learned of it in the past.”<sup>394</sup> Cognitive memory includes: jokes, stories, city layout, mathematical equations, truths of logic, etc. According to experimental psychologists, it is based on ‘encoding’ and not mirror representation (or storage) of the objects we remember. In fact “[they] have shown that literal recall is very rare and unimportant, remembering being not a matter of reproduction but of construction; it is the construction of a ‘schema’, a coding, which enables us to distinguish and, therefore, to recall.”<sup>395</sup> Most of our memories are processed through three distinctive (though not exclusive) codes: ‘semantic code,’ ‘verbal code,’ and ‘visual code.’ The first is hierarchical and topic based reflecting our idea about the world and logical connections that exist within it.

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<sup>391</sup> Geoff King. 1996. *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies*. New York: St. Martin’s Press: 41.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid: 41.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid: 43.

<sup>394</sup> Paul Connerton. 2010 (1989). *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 22.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid: 27.

The second is indispensable for our ability to succeed in verbal expression. The 'visual code' renders objects of memory into images, and is claimed to be the strongest memory code. Connerton commented that "[these] images are much better retained than abstract items because such concrete items undergo a double encoding in terms of visual coding as well as verbal expression."<sup>396</sup>

These findings in the area of cognitive memory and mental mapping give us better understanding of the mechanism employed within Sichuan boatmen's traditions. The power of images and thus of multiple encoding was essential for the construction and rendering of the boatmen's world.

Moreover, we need to underline that *haozi* were not personal but rather communal, social memories – they functioned and pertained to a group more than to each individual. In this respect, Sichuan *haozi* were not unique. Since it is almost impossible to divide personal and social memory, James Fentress and Chris Wickham have advanced the argument that memory is a 'social fact,' meaning that memories are structured by a whole set of social interactions (language, teaching, collective ideas).<sup>397</sup> Fentress and Wickham have underlined that: "When we remember, we represent ourselves to ourselves and to those around us. To the extent that our 'nature' – that which we truly are – can be revealed in articulation, we are what we remember."<sup>398</sup> This type of social memory can be seen as knowledge as it provides categories and interpretations, which are often unconsciously applied to interpret a variety of both personal and group experiences.<sup>399</sup> There are different 'prompts,' which people use to maintain and reconstruct their memories. Maurice Halbwachs has emphasized the role of places and spatial frameworks in our social coding, as their change is much slower than the dynamic of human life and thus provide unbroken lines of common experience.<sup>400</sup> Paul Connerton has pointed to performative elements of social life as stabilizers for ideas, images, and presumptions held by people across time. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, in different ways, have emphasized the role of historical events and recollections of historical events in transmitting attitudes, mindsets and interpretative categories within communities.

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid: op.cit.

<sup>397</sup> James Fentress and Chris Wickham. 1992. *Social Memory*. Oxford, and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers: 7.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid: op.cit.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid: 26.

<sup>400</sup> Connerton: 37.



We will see how these elements demonstrated their respective relevance in the group memory of Sichuan boatmen.

Our subsequent discussion is built upon the premise that memories-representations of both province and self are congruent in the boatmen songs. The knowledge contained in the songs was equally essential for work as it was for fortifying the professional group, determining its place in the social world and manifesting its claims to it – thus appropriating it. The following analysis will thus be divided into three parts: analysis of the organization of the work songs as tools for recording natural and social spaces; analysis of the images conveyed in the songs; and interpretation of these to illuminate the cultural milieu, which boatmen constructed and transmitted in their traditions. Taking this approach, I refute the point repeatedly put forward by Chinese scholars of folklore and popular Sichuan songs, such as Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng. They claimed that *haozi* had an almost entirely utilitarian character and simply provided an accurate representation of the world.<sup>401</sup> Instead, I would claim that myth and memory were means of recording and organizing such information. Their extensive exploitation reflects trackers' culture and worldview just as much as it produces a picture of the province. The songs portray what was considered significant and memorable for this social group, what from their perspective constituted the land they lived in and the people they interacted with. They allow us to investigate how their distinctive professional identity was constructed as well as their class identity.

## **'Mapping' the River World**

### **Constructing the Map**

In their work the Sichuan boatmen were forced to rely only on very limited resources. The nature of their work and the necessity for communication over extended space while performing a muscle straining job left them dependent on what could be remembered by means of repetitive singing. We can see roughly three types of knowledge organization present in this sub-genre of Sichuan *haozi*. The first type consisted of simple itineraries connecting one place with another. Another provided some additional information, association, description, or humoristic puns, which were designed to enhance memory and give some detail about the location. The last type was much more elaborate in the

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<sup>401</sup> *Chuan*: 384-395. ZGYJC: 1-4.

descriptive elements, connecting places with particular metaphors, images, myths or historical events, rather than connecting one place to another.

The simplest of these *haozi*, when transcribed and stripped of the complex vocalizations, appear more as lists than as songs. An excellent example of this kind is “Counting Rapids” (“Shu tan” 數灘)<sup>402</sup> describing a river trawl from Chongqing down the Yangzi:

朝天門開船兩條河，	<i>Starting from Facing Heaven Gate, you face two rivers,</i>
大佛寺落眼打一方；	<i>From Great Buddha Temple look down the current;</i>
茅溪橋落眼楊八灘，	<i>From Straw Brook Bridge look to Eight Rapids of Poplar</i>
	<i>Trees,</i> <sup>403</sup>
黑石子落眼下寸灘；	<i>From Black Stone look down to Inch Rapid;</i>
張幺河下朱老灘，	<i>From Zhang’s First River to Old Zhu’s Rapid,</i>
到了唐家沱要點關；	<i>When you come to the Tang’s Mansion Bay, stop for a</i>
	<i>while;</i> <sup>404</sup>
大興場落眼黃臘灘，	<i>From Great Prosperity Field look down to the Beach of</i>
	<i>Yellow Cured Meat,</i>
豬鴨子下碓巴灘；	<i>From Pig and Duck down to Pounding Stick Rapid;</i>

[...]

The song not only gives a list of places but also some basic indications. We can interpret it as a guide as to where and how to go down river from Chongqing, as the Great Buddha Temple is north east of the city, already after the confluence of the Yangzi and Jialing Rivers. As seen

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<sup>402</sup> ZGYJC: 13.

<sup>403</sup> In Sichuan dialect *tan* 灘 describes the river rapid. “水流最速且有坡度處” *Chuan*: 1044.

<sup>404</sup> In Sichuan dialect *tuo* 沱: is a bay formed as an outcome of meeting of two river currents, often existing at the confluence of two rivers. “江之回流而停顿處” *Chuan*: 1044.

from the above extract, this *haozi* also gave some additional information, however limited: where it is worth stopping and what stages one would cover while going down. In the further lines the song ‘arrives’ at where it was noted, there was a famous garden:

涪陵有個荔枝園;                      *In Fuling there is one Lychee Garden;*

The song finishes with ‘at the High Mountains’ (kongling 崆嶺), which were the opening to Demon Gate Pass (Guimenguan 鬼門關), the beginning of the most dangerous Yangzi Gorges linking Sichuan to Hubei province.

Such straight-forward linking of one place to another was based on an elementary mnemonic tool, where sequences of objects met in life were correlated with their proper names. The place names themselves, many of them not existing apart from in the songs, were, with the exception of major settlements or temples, largely of informal nature and local origin, perhaps the boatmen’s own creations. Limiting the number of objects to remember and sequencing them according to performed activity allowed for a narrowing of reality and for organization of it in a relevant manner. A boatman could thus recall an appropriate station and plan his movement through the world of the rivers as particular steps on his journey came under his mental control.

More complex songs relied not only on place names but equally on the associations and relations between particular landmarks. The two following examples clearly illustrate this particularity. One was titled after its first line, 川江兩岸有名堂 (“Chuanjiang liang yan you ming tang”/“Famous Halls Line Both Yangzi Banks”)<sup>405</sup> and its first lines went as follows:

川江兩岸有名堂,                      *Famous halls line both Yangzi banks,*

聽我慢慢說端詳:                      *Listen and I will slowly tell you about them all:*

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<sup>405</sup> ZGYJC: 9-10.

“南田壩”的豬兒粑甜得漾，	<i>South Field Valley [Nantianba] where pigs and sweet cakes overflow,</i> <sup>406</sup>
“滬州老窖”味道長；	<i>Luzhou's Old [Wine] Cellar [Luzhou Laojiao] whose taste stays for long;</i>
“水市”机頭鬧嚷嚷；	<i>Water Market [Shuishi] and its incessant yells;</i>
水淹土地“羅漢場”；	<i>The submerged earth god is in Luo Han Field [Luohanchang];</i> <sup>407</sup>
“水米灘”放船要上浪，	<i>Watery Rice Rapid [Shuimitan] throws boats up the waves,</i>
“內口”取名“太安場”；	<i>Inner Mouth [Neikou] is also called Grand Peace Field [Tai'an chang];</i>

[...]

Interestingly, apart from *tang*, halls or places of outstanding importance, the song treats locations which had meaning almost solely on the map of the boatmen: fields, rapids and stops which belonged to their route through Sichuan. It could be read as a certain ‘ennoblement of their space’, but I would rather associate it with the often ironic and purposefully imprecise language of the songs.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> In river descriptions *ba* 壩 signifies either a mound in the middle of the river (usually in conjunction *heba* 河壩) or a moraine on the bank of the river (usually as *shaba* 沙壩): *Chuan*: 1044. Here I apply a translation proposed by Richard von Glahn, namely “valley bottom.” *Ba* was one of the unique place names existing in Sichuan since at least Song-period colonization: “The numerous placenames derived from small, flat plains, either in valley bottoms (*ba*, *gai* [壩, 垓]) or amidst the hills (*kan*, *wu* [坎, 垭]) attest to central importance of rice cultivation in the siting villages. In recent times the irrigated rice fields of Sichuan’s river valleys have become known as *batian*, a designation denoting both the physical features of the valley bottoms and the use of weirs to divert water from streams into the rice paddies. The meaning of *ba* as a placeword in Song Sichuan is confused by the contemporary usage of the word *batian* in the lower Yangzi Basin to refer to both diked fields and water storage ponds. In believe that in Luzhou *ba* merely signified a flat valley bottom until long after the Song period.” Von Glahn, 1987: 180-181.

<sup>407</sup> Luo Han 羅漢: Chinese for arhat, Buddhist saint.

<sup>408</sup> Many more such ‘twists’ can be seen in socially oriented songs, see: Chapter 6.

Another *haozi* of a similar sort was a famous depiction of Chongqing, which followed from the city gates and docks to depict the city: 四川省水碼頭要數重慶 (“Sichuansheng shuimatou yao shu Chongqing”/“Among Sichuan harbors one has to count Chongqing”).<sup>409</sup> For our purpose here, the first six lines will suffice:

四川省水碼頭要數重慶, *Among Sichuan Harbors one has to count Chongqing,*

開九門閉八門十七道門： *Nine gates open, eight gates closed, together seventeen gates;*

[illegible]

千廝門花包子雪白如銀，      *Thousand Servant Gate [Qiansimen], snow white bundles are*  
*worth as much as silver,*

臨江門賣木材樹料齊整,      *River Overlooking Gate [Linjiangmen] sells wood lined in perfect order,*

通遠門鑼鼓响抬埋死人,      *Passing to Far-off Gate [Tongyuanmen] – bells bid farewell to*  
*the deceased,*

$$[\dots]$$

As we can see the list of possible associations was very broad and spanned the whole variety of human activity and natural idiosyncrasies one could meet when travelling in the region. We can also see a number of analogies between associations applied to predominantly 'rural' (the former song) and almost entirely 'urban' environments (the latter). In both cases the set of metaphors include food products (pork, rice cakes, salt etc.), sounds (dock quarrels, funeral bells), religious cults and rituals (arhats, greeting processions into the city walls); or people and local histories (humorous stories of monks and nuns; the history of Chongqing walls).

409 ZGYJC: 1-2.

The technique of memorization applied in these *haozi* bears some resemblance to the well-known mnemonic technique, Method of Loci, namely, projecting a set of things or ideas onto other physical objects, such as pictures, furniture, etc.<sup>410</sup> Differences, however, abound. Most of the boatmen were well aware of the places they visited, which they characterized by ascribing to them meanings and associations serving their unique purposes. Many names could have been of their own creation, especially if there were particular geo-morphological features, such as river mouths or high cliffs. Others, such as various human constructions including temples, fortresses, or pavilions, were perhaps of more stable or even historical origins.<sup>411</sup> None of them, however, were abstract locations, nor were they abstracted, as in case of Method of Loci, to provide a universal tool for memorization. Rather, in order to enhance memory they exploited textual association, relating particular actions to places where they could occur or took place regularly – markets, celebrations, money shops or government yamen, each of them linked with outstanding or unique practices. Correlation of both allowed for cross checking of the memorized mental maps. In the case that one could not recall the place name one could rely on memory of the activity; conversely the activity could be recalled on recollection of the place name. *Haozi* thus used a memory technique which comprised interweaving three elements: physical spaces, their names, and the related activity, each serving as a memory prompt and objects of memory at the same time.

Apart from the above-mentioned techniques, an additional clue to the boatmen's 'art of memory' lies in their skillful exploitation of musical and oral art. Each song, as both examples above show, had a fairly consistent and uniform textual, rhythmic and rhyme structure. Basically, each stanza consisted of a place name and following metaphor together forming a repetitive number of syllables per stanza, allowing for a uniform rhythm in the song to be maintained. Additionally, most songs were fairly consistent in applying a rhyme pattern characteristic to Chinese poetry called *yayun* 押韵. This meant that each stanza in the poem or song ended with the same rhyming syllable (*yunjiao* 韵脚 or *yunzi* 韵字).<sup>412</sup> In the case of

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<sup>410</sup> History of the memory techniques: Frances A. Yates. 1974. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: Chicago University Press: 1-26.

<sup>411</sup> Scholars of Chongqing toponyms, such as Peng Botong indicate that a large number of names have origins in popular stories; in most cases this problem is irresolvable. Peng, 2001. As indicated in the Introduction, popular stories not related to any particular locations were later adopted and stabilized for areas they originally did not describe.

<sup>412</sup> <http://www.chinahistoryforum.com/index.php?showtopic=10264>.

the songs quoted above, we can see, for the first one the following sequence: -ang, -iang, -ang, -ang, -ang, -ang, -iang, -iang, -ang, -ang. The latter is less consequent in the application of this principle: -ing, -en, -eng, -in, -eng, -en; though most of the inconsistency comes from mixing nasal and not-nasal vowels. However important these elements may be, we should follow the advice of John M. Foley in respect to the formal characteristics of each text. Since, as with most oral arts, we are dealing with only a fraction of existing pieces, while being largely denied a chance to hear them performed, textual strictness in formal analysis should rather be discouraged.<sup>413</sup> What we can be fairly assured of is that the musical and lyric structure of songs contributed to a varying degree in aiding memory, possibly even, in a manner equally important to the mnemonic technique inscribed within the song.

The textual power of these *haozi* becomes more visible when we look at the most sophisticated pieces, which in some cases resembled oral narratives. The ballad of Hechuan gates ("Counting city gates of Hechuan"/"Shu Hechuan chengmen", 數合州城門) will serve as our example.<sup>414</sup>

瑞映門扎的部隊多得很,	<i>Gate Reflecting Auspiciousness [Ruiyingmen] is crowded with brawling soldiers,</i>
盡是手拉營。	<i>Who exhaust themselves putting up a camp.</i>
塔耳門熱鬧得很,	<i>At Tower's Ear Gate [Taermen] it is very lively,</i>
今天要殺幾個人。	<i>Today they are going to kill a number of men.</i>
洛陽門道路寬套得很,	<i>Luoyang Gate [Luoyangmen] where the road is very broad,</i>
又可走太和又可走遂寧。	<i>Some go to Taihe and others to Suining.</i> <sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Foley, 2002: 29-38.

<sup>414</sup> *Chuan*: 850.

<sup>415</sup> Most probably today's Taihe township north of Hechuan city in Hechuan District, Chongqing Municipality (Chongqingshi, Hechuanqu Taihezhen 重慶市合川區太和鎮). Suining is north of Hechuan in today's Sichuan Province (Sichuansheng Suiningshi 四川省遂寧市).

青龍橋楊顏婆正在粉，	<i>On Green Dragon Bridge [Qinglongqiao], the ladies Yang and Yan are just making up,</i>
周么妹正在拉人。	<i>[and] little sister Zhou is pulling people [in].</i>
學昌門熱鬧得很，	<i>Gate of Prosperous Learning [Xuechangmen] is crowded and noisy,</i>
住的是几條江拉船工人。	<i>There reside trackers that work on local rivers.</i>
人和門廖瞎子拉皮條得行得很，	<i>[at] Harmonious Relations Gate [Renhemmen], the blind Liao is a skillful pimp,</i>
五個錢包你人一個進門。	<i>With five bundles of cash you enter the [brothel's] door.</i>
大南門賣雜貨齊全得很，	<i>Great Southern Gate [Dananmen] sells groceries all in great order,</i>
大蒜老姜花椒麻辣死人。	<i>Garlic, ginger, pepper, spice [all can] kill people.</i>
小南門賣旺子相因得很，	<i>Small Southern Gate [Xiaonanmen], sellers vigorously attract [customers],</i>
几个錢就可買一大盆盆。	<i>So for some cash one can buy a big pot.</i>
北門里唱川戲的多得很，	<i>At the Northern Gate [Beimen][they] sing so much Sichuan opera,</i>
三撥班子都在唱駝子回門。	<i>Three theater groups all sing 'Hunchback comes back home.'</i> <sup>416</sup>

In visible contrast to the previously described songs, this *haozi* (and some of similar style) turned the work environment into a narrative; each place was animated with activities

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<sup>416</sup> Sichuan opera title.



performed by incoming and residing boatmen, local inhabitants, soldiers, sellers, and prostitutes. The song was as much an itinerary connecting one route-station to another as a guide to a particular city or a river valley travelled by the boat people.

What was remembered then was to a much greater extent a relationship established between each location and the activity performed there. To be memorable, however, such relations needed to be either easily validated within the experience of each boatman singing and remembering the song, or the images had to function similarly to stock phrases, in the same way as the epic traditions are understood by the proponents of the Oral-Formulaic Theory.<sup>417</sup> This theory emphasizes the usage of fixed phrases coding whole sections of the epic's content.<sup>418</sup> It explains how memorization of lengthy text was possible for storytellers forming the foundation of their art. Alan Dundes has stated that this method did not apply exclusively to epic narratives, and is still broadly applied in other oral genres, yet the importance of epics and the functions of fixed phrases within epics are crucial<sup>419</sup> We can see this applied within the songs of our study here. Traditions on Chongqing typically commence from the list of gates:

朝天門大碼頭迎官接聖,     *Facing Heaven Gate, great dock, invites officials, receives saints,*

千廝門花包子雪白如銀,     *Thousand Servant Gate, snow white bundles are worth as much  
as silver,*<sup>420</sup>

臨江門賣木材樹料齊整,     *River Overlooking Gate sells wood lined in perfect order,*

etc.

And so on, as all nine open and eight closed gates of Chongqing are listed. Opening phrases like:

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<sup>417</sup> Sichuan *haozi* in this sense are not unique examples in China. Similar claim has been placed for Jiangsu mountain songs (*shan'ge*), see: Antoinet Schimmelpenninck and Frank Kouwenhoven. "Unfinished Symphonies: The Formulaic Structure of Folk-songs in Southern Jiangsu" in: Børdahl, 1999: 78-87.

<sup>418</sup> For the discussion of Oral-Formulaic Theory, its history and development see: Foley, 1988: 83-156.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid: xi.

<sup>420</sup> Snow-white bundles indicate the salt trade – one of the main sources of Chongqing's income till the mid-nineteenth century.

朝天門開船兩條河，                      *Departing on boat from Facing Heaven Gate one enters two*  
*rivers,*<sup>421</sup>

or

朝天門，大碼頭，                      *Facing Heaven Gate, a great dock,*<sup>422</sup>

as well as closing ones:

說得多，要記倒，                      *I spoke a lot, you have to remember well,*

莫把碼頭弄錯了。                      *Not to mistake any of the docks.*<sup>423</sup>

These are all repetitive in content and can be found in various songs, irrespective of the following content. Such fixed phrases supported trackers' memory, allowing for the inclusion and adjustment of innumerable objects or metaphors onto a stable frame. With the limited number of songs preserved, and the very restricted variety of descriptions used in them, I would argue that all the above-mentioned techniques were used simultaneously or in various periods of each song's development. Eventually, the associations reached a degree of stability, thus establishing for example that Chaotianmen [Facing Heaven Gate] in Chongqing was always referred to greeting officials and religious processions, while Qiansimen [Thousand Servants Gate] was associated with the cult of a local god, Chicken Feather Spirit or trade in salt.

The formalization of images, as we will see, should not be exaggerated. Sichuan *haozi* appear to be often of much more recent date than most epic traditions researched by scholars. Compared to their conspicuous function in trackers' work life, they occupied a very limited presence in their entertainment life. This certainly diminished the textual formalization so characteristic to other forms of storytelling or even other songs popular in the region. Nevertheless, the degree to which this sub-genre of songs represented 'reality' needs to be carefully examined, or rather in the light of the recent years of Chinese folklore investigation, reexamined.

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<sup>421</sup> ZGYJC: 13.

<sup>422</sup> *Chuan*: 850.

<sup>423</sup> *Chuan*: 851.

As we have seen, multiple elements contributed to the effectiveness of this sub-genre making the songs both easy to remember and useful for Sichuan river workers. Within *Haozi* an intersection of mnemonic and textual techniques occurred. They originated from various sources such as rote learning and oral performative art. An underlying principle encoded in the songs, however, was their functionality and usefulness for workers who created and reproduced them. *Haozi* constituted a mental map of the region and part of craft knowledge, an indispensable tool for river workers whose safe and successful working life depended on knowing both the natural and human environment they were part of.

## Picturing the Spaces

### On Cities

Whether depicting Sichuan cities or river valleys the songs presented an environment bustling with activity. Two urban centers attracted special attention and numerous *haozi* were created to describe and provide a guide through them. Most were concerned with the prefectural capital of Chongqing, while, for example, an important Jialing port called Hechuan (located north of Chongqing) was also the subject of many separate traditions. The textual richness of these songs and the number of *haozi* they are mentioned in explains why we should give them priority.

Both cities were viewed from their gates, which in the case of Eastern Sichuan were indivisible from the outlying river docks. In the late Qing times just as under warlord rule, the gates divided the space that was within and outside the city walls – it was a place of inspection and collection of customs duties.<sup>424</sup> More importantly, it was a place where goods were unloaded and stored, where companies and guilds congregated and people thronged, buying and selling incoming products shipped from the surrounding counties and more distant, even foreign locations. This regular trade was built into the conventionalized associations recounted in the songs. Thus, we come back to the song of Chongqing nine gates, which in shorter or longer versions was repeated in most sung descriptions of the city. After listing Heaven Facing Gate (Chaotianmen), Thousand Servants Gate (Qiansimen), River

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<sup>424</sup> “[In Chongqing] [grey-clad] soldiers swarm in the streets and at the gates, and every chair, and every package leaving or entering the gates is examined, with a view to the exaction of likin or the confiscation of arms. My chair was stopped entering and leaving in order that the soldiers might satisfy themselves that it was really a camera that I was carrying.” Woodhead: 50. Interesting description see: Basil: 65-67.

Overlooking Gate (Linjiangmen) and Passing to Far-off Gate (Tongyuanmen) it continued as follows:

[...]

南紀門菜籃子涌出涌進, *Gate of Regulating Southern Kingdoms [Nanjimen] is crossed by baskets filled with vegetables,*<sup>425</sup>

金紫門對着那鎮臺衙門, *Purple Golden Gate [Jinzimen] faces city's yamen,*

儲奇門賣藥材供人醫病, *Holding Marvel Gate [Chuqimen] where medicines are sold to treat the sick,*

太平門賣的是海味山珍, *Great Peace Gate [Taipingmen] is where rare delicacies are sold,*

東水門有一口四方古井, *Eastern Water Gate [Dongshuimen] touches four ancient wells,*

[...].<sup>426</sup>

Tying particular gates to trades and practices thus created a certain static vision of the city, where order was maintained through the functions attached to each part of it. The song not only described goods, but also ritual practices, such as receiving officials, and processions associated with religious or funerary celebrations. Moreover, certain indications were given as to important or outstanding elements of the urban landscape. Most prominent among them were the government yamen in the vicinity of Jinzi Gate (Purple Golden Gate) and old wells, or rather water tanks constructed as an element of fire-relief infrastructure. A number of elements in this song attract our attention. The first is the choice of goods listed, such as wood, medicines and foodstuffs, which were all traditional trades of Chongqing, recorded at

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<sup>425</sup> According to one source name Nanjimen was related to a phrase of a poem from *Shijing* 詩經, Xiaoya 小雅, Siyue (Fourth Month) 四月: (line 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) “滔滔江漢，南國之紀，盡瘁以仕，寧莫我有。” which translates as “Grandly flow the Jiang and the Han, Regulators of the southern States. Worn out as I am with service, He yet takes no notice of me.” Indication, see: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1232001.htm>. For translation into modern Chinese, see: <http://www.yshin.com/Article/fenleijingdian/200609/554.html>. English translation from: <http://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/si-yue>.

<sup>426</sup> ZGYJC: 1-2.

least from the city's revival in early Qing.<sup>427</sup> The choice, nevertheless, is restricted and what is represented cannot be connected with any particular historical period in the city's history.

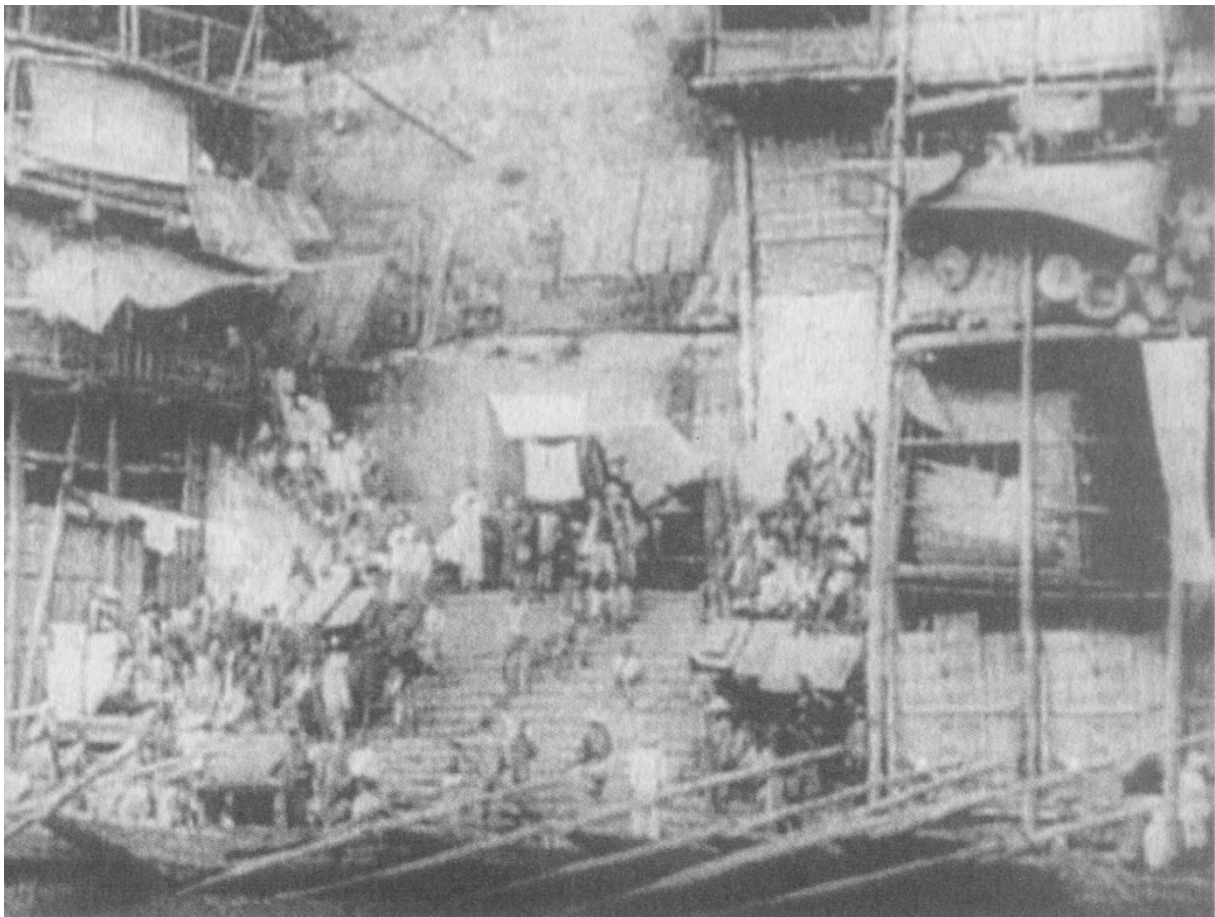


Figure 7: Thousand Servants Gate (Qiansimen), probably in the 1930s; source: <http://2010.cqlib.cn/Upfile/oldpic/老码头/嘉陵江段主要码头/千厮门码头/繁忙的老码头.jpg>

Other *haozi* on Chongqing as well as on other towns in Eastern Sichuan were equally selective in their choice of information. Before proceeding to a discussion on other urban centers, let us consider one more tradition depicting the main metropolis of the region. Called “Talking of Chongqing” (“Shuo Chongqing” 說重慶), it was an outstanding song if we take into consideration the amount of detail it presents.<sup>428</sup> Though not unique in venturing away from the river banks, it is the most thorough ‘walk’ through the city, in which streets assume the role of channels, through which the singers’ words navigate, map and recalls various places. Since, it is impossible to quote here a whole sixty five verse song we intend

<sup>427</sup> Look further section: ‘Chronologies of the map.’

<sup>428</sup> ZGYJC: 5-8.

to focus on certain more interesting excerpts. The song starts with almost identical verses to the previously quoted *haozi*, with minor differences in three lines:

臨江門開木廠樹料齊整,     *River Overlooking Gate opens to the lumber mill and wood is arranged neatly,*

[...]

儲奇門賣藥材治人疾病,     *Holding Marvel Gate is where medicines are sold to treat men struck with illnesses,*

[...]

東水門白鶴亭香火旺盛,     *Eastern Water Gate, White Crane Pavilion [ – ] incense burns vigorously,*

[...].

Further on, however, the tone of the song and type of narration differs significantly. It proceeds with a description matching urban spaces with routine public activities performed there. Thus the only city square of old Chongqing, an open space where major streets intersected was treated through the following images:

“較場壩”地方寬多少美景,     *Parade Field [Jiaochengba], is a broad place, how many spectacular views,*

談生意講買賣賺金賺銀。     *Talking business, bargaining, earning gold and silver,*

想當年春秋操好不齊整,     *In these years all is without any order,*

眾教頭操壩上大練兵丁。     *[When] crowds of privates are put to drill.*

It was seen not only as a place where one could have a splendid interesting view, but also, it appears, where one could be entertained with a whole variety of visual experiences, including traders, bustling crowds or soldiers being drilled by their officers. According to research conducted by Peng Botong, Jiaochangba was the place where in the year 1600, Li

Hualong 李化龍 (1554-1611), a Ming general famous for his successful Korean campaign, received the oath from the troops preparing to suppress the Yang Yinglong 楊應龍 (1554-1600) aboriginal rebellion.<sup>429</sup> The same place also saw the dismemberment (zhe 磔) of imperial officials by the soldiers of the most infamous Sichuan rebel, Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠. During the early Qing, on one side of the field there was a Yanwuting 演武廳 [Hall of Martial Arts], a place used for reviewing troops (yuebing 閱兵). This particular practice, however, had become rare with time and houses were starting to cover the open space. By the last decades of the Qing, the old square was covered with narrow streets filled with shops of many specializations. In the 1920s, it was reconstructed to adjust to car traffic, becoming one of the main urban intersections.<sup>430</sup> With all these stories, bustling markets, and traffic crossing, Jiaochangba was a place where the city lived life to the fullest; a place where confused colorful crowds congregated, busy with their daily duties and pastimes.

Different streets brought people from various walks of life, and the song juxtaposed two highly contrasted extremes:

“三牌坊”富貴家表之不盡，                      *Three Archways Ward [Sanpaifang] [where] opulence is demonstrated without an end,*

“魚市口”到冬至要殺犯人。                      *Fish-market Door [Yushikou] with each coming winter criminals are killed.*

Displays of wealth and status where the privileged parade continually, surrounded by images of bottomless misery with criminals publically executed provide a reflection of the striking concentration of diverse ways of life characteristic of urban space alone.

The city was not only a place of residence or where justice was exercised. Its life blood consisted in goods and money circulated in banks, company houses or markets. All of them found their place in the songs:

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<sup>429</sup> Peng, 2001: 92-93. Rebellion started in early 1599 and ended with suppression by Li Hualong troops and Yang Yinglong's suicide on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1600. Peter Allan Lorge. 2005. *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795*. London, New York: Routledge: 136.

<sup>430</sup> Peng, 2001: op.cit: 92-93.

“朝天門”開字號兌換金銀。

*Facing Heaven Gate opens to shops changing gold and silver.*

If anything could be characterized by persistence and routine, it was trade in traditional goods and local produce. The song navigated from market to market as if trying to show all one could buy in Chongqing:

“道門坎”賣瓜帽還賣鉛粉，

*Ridge of the Way [Daomenkan] sells gourd hats and lead powder,<sup>431</sup>*

“雙火墻”賣氈帽又賣氈纓。

*Twin Fire Wall [Shuanghuoqiang] sells felt hats and felt tassels.*

[...]

“大匠街”賣銅器又賣冬筍，

*Great Artisan Street [Dajiangjie] sells brass ware and winter bamboo shoots,*

“新街口”賣衣綫又賣頭繩。

*New Street Door [Xinjiiekou] sells cloth threads and ropes.*

[...]

“大梁子”賣冬帽又賣衣衾，

*Great Beam [Daliangzi] sells winter hats and quilts,*

“神仙口”賣毛飾又包赤金。

*Immortals Door [Shenxiankou] sells woolen ornaments and red gold bundles.*

“泰子齋”教門館出售好餅，

*Marvelous Peace [Taiziqi], in front of the school they sell delicious cakes,*

[...]

“米花街”賣布匹打成捆捆，

*Rice Flower Street [Mihuaajie] sells cloth tied into bundles,*

[...] etc.

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<sup>431</sup> When turned into paste, it was most probably used for makeup.



Goods could be small or large, some of them imported from the province, some of them local handicraft. The song represents a division of the city into specialized streets, each with shops of one type of goods. Not much research has been conducted into the organization of city space in Chongqing, yet we know that at least throughout the Qing this was the prevalent mode of registering and locating trades and crafts.<sup>432</sup> Evidence from other cities in Sichuan, especially the findings of Wang Di about Chengdu points to the accuracy of such representations.<sup>433</sup> Some Chongqing street names, like Wood Sellers Street (Muhuojie 木貨街), Medical Herbs Street (Caoyaojie 草藥街), Porcelain Street (Ciqijie 磁器街) etc. also seem to point in this direction.<sup>434</sup>

At times, the song focused on particular specialties, as with the cakes sold by the school gate. We cannot know whether the local baker was famous or this was a personal opinion of the song's author or an addition of the singer recorded by the collectors. Cakes were not the only foodstuffs enjoyed, and knowledge of where to find fresh products or which places to avoid was of some importance:

“大陽溝”菜市場街不乾淨,                      *Great Sun Creek [Dayanggou], vegetable market is not clean,*

Wine is another example of a local product lauded in popular tradition but not confirmed by elite sources:

“洪崖洞”到伏天涼快得很,                      *Cave of the Flooded Cliff [Hongyadong], on hot summer days it is very cool,*

廟堂內豆花酒遠近聞名。                      *In the temple inside, bean flower wine [is] far and near renowned.*

At least since 1750 (Qianlong 15<sup>th</sup> year), Hongyadong, was a place revered by the literati for its unique beauty – a waterfall flowing through a cave naturally cut in the high cliff of Chongqing. Many auspicious spirits were believed to reside there, thus motivating scholars

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<sup>432</sup> Gou Deyi: 115-127.

<sup>433</sup> Wang Di, 2003: 23-44, 68-76.

<sup>434</sup> The names can be found on the 1886 map of Chongqing, Peng, 2001: 93.

to carve the cave's walls with sculptures and inscriptions.<sup>435</sup> In 1939, the cave was still one of the main sights in the city with a sizable temple located inside.<sup>436</sup> Interestingly, in the work songs there only appears a remark about wine that was sold in the cave (or in its environs). We can only assume that the elite devotion and aesthetic pleasure was not shared by the lower classes, for whom the same place served a very different function – a corner of the city where one could hide from summer heat and enjoy some drink.

“Shuo Chongqing” gives us some indication of which cults were revered by the commoners. In fact, it seems that the city itself was a space of religious significance. Although there is insufficient proof as to the conceptualization of the whole city as imbued with supernatural power, its various parts certainly were considered to be efficacious due to the presence or activity of gods or a concentration of geomantic power. In this way Qiansimen was recalled as:

“千廝門”雞毛土地靈得很,	<i>Thousand Servant Gate, Chicken Feather God's efficacy</i>
	<i>is great,</i>
還雞願燒香火要數船民。	<i>And wishes fly with incense smoke, innumerable crowds</i>
	<i>of boatmen come.</i>

Boatmen revered their particular locality god and associated it with a city gate – the part of Chongqing they visited most. Cults of greater social scope were also mentioned:

“十王殿”供得有十殿閻君。	<i>Ten Kings Palace [Shiwangdian] has ten palaces for</i>
	<i>Yama.</i> <sup>437</sup>

[...]

“浮圖關”咽喉地上省路徑,	<i>Futu Pass [Futuguan] is the throat through which the</i>
	<i>road enters the province,</i> <sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Baxianzhi, 1939: 431-432.

<sup>436</sup> Lu Sihong: 82-83.

<sup>437</sup> Dian 殿, palace: denoted a highest level Buddhist temple. Yanwang 閻王, Yanjun 閻君: Yama: King of Hell.

<sup>438</sup> Two alternate names exist: Fotuguan 佛圖關 and Futuguan 浮圖關,

兩條河圍繞着重慶山城。

*Two rivers surround the mountain city of Chongqing.*

“真武山”鐵桅杆永鎮巴郡，

*Zhenwu Mountain [Zhenwushan] – Peak of Iron Masts  
overlooks Ba Prefecture,*<sup>439</sup>

新年時朝山客求簽敬神。

*At New Year people toward the mountain pay respects  
and ask for help.*

One interesting line reveals the author's or singer's attitude, and shows the way in which the text could have been altered, especially with such a 'hot' topic as beliefs in Republican and Communist times:

“大井灣”“小井灣”說鬼迷信，

*Big Well Bend [Dajingwan], Small Well Bend  
[Xiaojingwan] where [there is] superstitious talk of  
ghosts,*

Apart from temples, urban space was marked by many schools and some military installations (such as the/a cannon platform), though it was not only constituted through such material elements.

A significant role in the construction of an urban image was played by mythical space, built memories and histories, engraved more in the mind than in the stone and wood of Chongqing. The imagination of space had a cosmological meaning, representative of auspicious animals and shapes connoting moral precepts. Chongqing was imagined (and made real through buildings and wells placed according to geomantic principles, *fengshui*) to have the shape of a giant turtle, a potent symbol of longevity and persistence<sup>440</sup>:

“沙井灣”“鹽井坡”烏龜眼睛。

*Sand Well Bend [Shajingwan], Salty Well Slope  
[Yanjingpo] are tortoise eyes.*

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<sup>439</sup> Peak of Iron Masts was an alternative name for Tu Mountain: “真武觀遵西麓而上登鐵桅峰即塗山絕頂” *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 418.

<sup>440</sup> C. A. S. Williams. 1989 (1932) *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs: An Alphabetical Compendium of Antique Legends and Beliefs, as Reflected in the Manners and Customs of the Chinese*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company: 403-406.

“三元廟”不撞鐘光是敲磬；      *Temple of Three Seasons [Sanyuanmiao], to make an empty sound, do not strike the bell;*<sup>441</sup>

“龜頭山”敲了鐘不得安寧。      *Tortoise Head Mountain [Guitoushan], when the bell tolls one cannot remain in peace.*

The connection between magical animals lay in the same sphere of belief as the conception of numeric power. It was believed that an appropriate manipulation of the latter could protect people from harm and contribute to their success. Both traditions of Chongqing thus insist on repeating a formula of numbering the city gates which corresponded with the Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams (*jiugong bagua* 九宮八卦) – a geomantic compass:

開九門閉八門十七道門[.]      *Nine gates open, eight gates closed, together seventeen gates [.]*

This phrase has aroused a lot of interest among Chinese scholars and intellectuals, who in different degrees have associated the shape and geomantic qualities of Chongqing city walls with the premeditated actions of its constructors, the Southern Song official Peng Daya 彭大雅 (active before 1241) and early Ming official Dai Ding 戴鼎 (fl. 1371).<sup>442</sup> Peng Botong insisted on the intentional application of *fengshui* on the part of both constructors, rallying to his support a quotation from the treatise called *Shuzhong guangji* (1643) by a late-Ming geographer Cao Xuequan. Cao stated: “Today the circuit capital has seventeen gates, nine opened and eight closed; they resemble Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams, or the turtles head turned toward Mountain Tu.”<sup>443</sup> It would be difficult to find much of the detail presented by Cao Xuequan in the Chongqing *haozi*, or an awareness of the people it mentioned. Nevertheless, we can see that a number of motifs persisted in local culture and were engraved in the popular vision of the city, its shape, and the meaning of particular places it contained.

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<sup>441</sup> Translation not sure.

<sup>442</sup> Zhou Yong, 2002: 147-150. Peng, 2001: 57-58.

<sup>443</sup> “今府城為門十有七，九開八閉，以象九宮八卦，或曰象龜首，乃龜塗山。” *Shuzhong guangji*, *Mingshengji di shiqi* 名勝記第十七 (17): Shang Chuandong dao 上川東道, Chongqingfu 重慶府, Baxian fuguo 巴縣附郭. Peng, 1981: 17.

Chongqing songs were not entirely insensitive to the historical heroes that hailed from the city but it is quite noticeable that only one name appears in this tradition:

“七星崗”走下來“巴蔓子墳”。 *Seven Stars Mound [Qixinggang] walk down to Bamanzi's grave.*

Bamanzi was a hero from the Warring States period and the location and authenticity of his grave is more than debatable.<sup>444</sup> On the other hand, he was a hero of significant presence within local traditions and his story circulated broadly among both literary and plebeian circles of local society at least from the time Chang Qu composed his *Huayang guozhi* (4<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>445</sup>

The curious gathering of elements, which were included in this *haozi*, reflects the depth of impression made by the city, but also the amount of knowledge necessary to ‘master’ it and be able to exploit its complexity. The case of Chongqing is for a number of reasons outstanding compared to other Eastern Sichuan urban centers, whether because of size, wealth or diversity. If we look at the songs depicting second-ranking towns, such as Hechuan, we will see that the descriptive method and focus of the singer-observer were similar, but the size and relative importance affected the breadth of words and images. As an example will serve us a ballad quoted before, “Shu Hezhou cheng men.” This song brings our attention back to the execution grounds by the Taermen, with the crowds gaping at the death befalling criminals (?) or traitors (?). The gates are thronged either by soldiers (Ruiyingmen) or by boatmen (Xuechangmen). It appears that, wherever the boatmen put up their often temporary dwellings, the area became lively and exciting, most probably due to the coarse lifestyles of this largely male profession. Similarly, Green Dragon Bridge (Qinglongqiao) was famous for two people, most probably prostitutes, Yang Yanpo, who was powdering herself and Zhou Yaomei pulling the passers-by in. Groceries, garlic and Sichuan spices were sold next to the Great Southern Gate (Dananmen), whereas the Little Southern Gate (Xiaonanmen) was famous for good-fortune tickets, one could buy by handfuls for cash. The Northern Gate (Beimen) was famous for the Sichuan operas sung there continually.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Peng, 2001: 34-36.

<sup>445</sup> Liu Lin 刘琳, ed. 1984. Chang Qu 常璩 (Jin 晋). *Huayang guozhi xiaozhu* 華陽國志校注. Chengdu: Bashu shushe chubanshe: 32.

<sup>446</sup> *Chuan*: 850.

The song, similarly to “Shuo Chongqing” draws our attention to details of urban life, various groups existing within it and the spaces they occupied. Even more it contributes to a certain mental ‘zoning’ of the space, which is not otherwise divided. By pointing to specialized areas, and the people, sounds and experiences inscribed in them, it builds a memorable picture and makes the meaning immediately comprehensible, both stimulating the listeners’ imagination and giving them direction.

A ‘Less playful’ picture of Hechuan appears in the first verses of the song, “Embarking from Hechuan” (“Hechuan kaichuan” 合川開船):<sup>447</sup>

合川開船下嘉陵江，                      *Embarking from Hechuan sail down Jialing River,*

八角亭修在梁梁上。                      *Eight Horned Pavilion [Bajiaoting] is built on top of the ridge.*

南津街的白塔挨着火柴廠，                      *White pagoda of Southern Ford Street [Nanjinjie] is close to the  
match factory,*

東津沱有個渝豐紗廠。                      *Eastern Ford Pool [Dongjintuo] has one Yufeng cotton mill.*

馬廟尼姑想和向，                      *Horse Temple [Mamiao] Buddhist nuns are craving for monks,*

張公灘險要南倒船邦。                      *South of dangerous Prince Zhang Rapid [Zhanggongtan] is  
actually a boat kingdom.*

枯水天甑子石在幹坡上，                      *[During] low water, stones steam, [one has to] climb a cliff,*

釣魚城威風修在巨石梁。                      *Fishing town [Diaoyucheng] is proudly raised on the huge rock.*

軍民保城把元兵抗，                      *Soldiers and civilians guarded it against Mongol [Yuan] invaders,*

蒙哥大汗把命喪。                      *Great Han Möngke lost [there] his life.*

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<sup>447</sup> Chuan: 853.

Together with a distinctive focus on production and the factories or workshops established in the 1930s, this *haozi* also recalls glorious elements of past history, which have remained in the form of material proof of the past – the fortress chains of Diaoyu town built to defend against the Mongol invasion during the Southern Song.<sup>448</sup> As in the case of Chongqing, the Hechuan tradition lauded men for their military rather than for their civilian exploits, irrespective if they were heroes (Ba Manzi) or villains (Meng’ge – the Mongol Great Khan Möngke, 1209-1259). Another quite characteristic motif, frequently appearing in Ming and Qing novels and related storytelling was ridiculing the morals of Buddhist monks and nuns.<sup>449</sup> The line: “At the Horse Temple [Mamiao] nuns miss/desire monks” seems to resound with the same sentiment.

The examples presented open up to us boatmen’s perspective on the cities: their perception and memory of them as much as their means of coping with, organizing and reconstructing them. The vantage point taken by our assumed singer is most interesting. Although the boatman or worker did not refrain from noticing the various beauty spots that so preoccupied literary perception, he tended to enmesh and almost lose them among the spaces and places he interacted with in his daily experience.<sup>450</sup> The unique perspective is firmly marked by the omnipresent references to gates and docks – places that existed and demarcated the borders of organized urban life and that defined the place where boatmen belonged. The cities towering above the rivers were entered only partially and savored too only in the parts that were familiar – the streets and wards attached to gates. These were spaces where a boatman could find his entertainment, reside between one excursion and another, and conduct petty trade on his own account. These were also the meeting places between his world of the river and that of large business and government on which he was dependent – the storage facilities of companies and markets all congregated by the gates confirming the division of worlds and spheres of belonging.

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<sup>448</sup> Wei Yingtao, 1991: 190.

<sup>449</sup> An outstanding example is a late Ming novel *Monks and Nuns in the Sea of Sins* (*Sengni niehai* 僧尼孽海); English translation by Howard S. Levy and Richard F. S. Yang in: Howard S. Levy, etc. 1975. *Two Chinese Sex Classics*. Taipei: The Oriental Cultural Service. Frequent references can also be found in the most popular novels: *Shuihuzhuan*, *Jinpingmei* etc.

<sup>450</sup> Those included so-called *shierjing* [twelve beauties] – famous mountains, caves, rocks, and temples: Lu Sihong: 82-89. On literati representation of cities, see: Sun Xun, Liu Fang. “Cities in traditional Chinese fiction and their modern interpretation,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 3 (2), 2009: 174-181.

The song “Talking of Chongqing” uniquely transcends this boundary and shows the little man’s appropriation and usage of the space within the walls, in the city proper. It catalogues in an unmatched manner the streets and wards of Chongqing, telling us how each of them can be used, whether for gain, or the excitement of aesthetic pleasure. At the same time it strips away the perspective of the city as splendid and considered beautiful, making it into spaces that are seemingly ordinary. Yet this feature can be approached from two angles: the first would put emphasis on usefulness and relate the space memorized by boatmen to the activities necessary for their economic sustenance.

A second, different reading comes from understanding that a long list of goods, objects of wonder, historical heroes and revered gods represent a cultural choice on the part of the boatmen. Not only did aesthetic perception differ between the literati and lower classes, but also the very comprehension of what particular objects, spaces, and monuments meant. It is apparent that the goods on display in Chongqing markets were not listed only in order to guide one through the complex web of city streets. Walking through urban space constituted equally of inhabitants and material objects, boatmen formulated their own order of the city, where choice, sequence and representation belonged to them. Such a picture indeed represented their view of the world. This view expressed only limited acquaintance with elite representations, elite history or elite understanding of beauty. The boatmen, instead, focused on what they could access and what mattered for their work, lifestyle, cultural or physical needs. The *haozi*, or boatmen ‘guides’ through the city, with all their descriptive names (Three Tablets Ward, Fish Market Door, Twin Fire Wall, Tortoise Head Mountain, etc.) and various products, were pictures of the city as a social and material entity, as much as an expression of aesthetic and cultural needs. In this sense “Talking of Chongqing” reveals the way in which *haozi*, apart from directly functional applications, were also a way of culturally appropriating the inhabited environment.

### **On province**

Images of cities were by no means the only ones transmitted through Sichuan boatmen songs. Cities existed as part of a broader world – one bound by a whole navigable river system. The method of describing this wider world, however, was not at all different from the one we observed while analyzing urban representations. Some songs were solely concerned with naming places; these names, often poetic or filled with a meaning now hard



to discern, sufficed for a description. Other songs focused as much on depicting what boatmen saw as remarkable as on what was fairly mundane and accessible and within their means. As is going to become clear through the examples provided below, the singers often blurred the borders between the wonderful and the commonplace producing images that we understand as ironic.

Most commonly, the image of Sichuan inscribed in *haozi*, similarly to that of the cities, was created by depicting products typical to each place along the rivers. A few examples should suffice to illustrate the three types of representation. The songs from the series concerning counting rapids or landings are an excellent example of the straightforward representation of the river-land (“Shutan zhiyi” 數灘之一).<sup>451</sup> Their textual value lies solely in listing the full names of consecutive stations or dangerous spots leading from Chongqing down Yangzi, such as Great Buddha Temple 大佛寺 (Figure 8), Black Stone 黑石子, Wild Mule 野驢子, Fish Mouth 魚嘴, Crossing Beams Stone 橫板石, Lu Family Creek 魯家溪, Wang Family Beach 王家灘, Wooden Fish Moraine 木魚磧, or Thundering Blessing Rapid 雷福灘. All these names were descriptive and communicated the way boatmen imagined their space of work and, though lost to our perspective, a set of associations connected with local nature, history or mythology.

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<sup>451</sup> *Chuan*: 856-857; see also above: “Shutan” 數灘.



Figure 8: Great Buddha Temple down river from Chongqing; currently a site of the Great Buddha Temple Great Yangzi Bridge (Dafosi Changjiang Daqiao 大佛寺長江大橋); source: <http://2010.cqlib.cn/Upfile/oldpic/老碼頭/長江段主要碼頭/大佛寺碼頭/大佛寺碼頭.jpg>

More engaging but also open to diverse interpretation are songs that depicted Sichuan expressing at the same time certain opinions about its life, customs or even morals. These songs quite clearly show the choices taken by popular singers as they carved out space for

their own usage and infused it with meanings only relevant to them. Further lines of an already quoted “Chuanjiang liang yan you ming tang”<sup>452</sup> represent these qualities clearly:

[...]

“水爬岩”尼姑偷和向，	<i>Water Climbing Cliff [Shuipayan] nuns steal monks,</i>
“瓦罐灘”對到“石城牆”；	<i>From Jar of Tiles Rapid [Waguantan] reach Stone City Wall</i>
	<i>[Shichengqiang];</i>
“新溪子”修在岩岩上，	<i>New Brook [Xinxizi] [it] is built on the cliffs top,</i>
河壩頭賣酒王二娘；	<i>Sandbar’s Head [Hebatou] [is where] Second Aunty Wang sells</i>
	<i>wine;</i>
“碓灘”靠船深幽幽，	<i>Rice-pounding Hammer Rapid [Duitan] put your boat next to</i>
	<i>the deep water hole,</i>
三六九又趕“彌陀場”；	<i>Three, six, nine and dash for Amithaba Field [Mituochoang];</i>
“灌口”紅船把人搶，	<i>Irrigation Gate [Guankou], red boats rush for people,</i>
“寡婦漕”賣糕孫三娘；	<i>[At] Widows’ Grain Port [Guafucao] Third Aunty Sun sells cakes;</i>
“臨江鎮”修在壩壩上，	<i>River Overlooking Town [Linjiangzhen] is built on the</i>
	<i>embankment’s top,</i>
“洞賓磧”菩薩守岩匡；	<i>The Moraine of the Cave’s Guests [Dongbinqi] Bodhisattva</i>
	<i>guards those on the cliff;</i>
兩條船放流跟着上，	<i>Two boats flow with the current,</i>
大橋白米往上裝；	<i>On the big bridge [they] pass loaded with white rice;</i>

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<sup>452</sup> ZGYJC: 9-10.

人老頭昏船打晃, *Muddled old faint man sways before falling,*

“石鼻子”轉彎要貼牆; *Stone Nose [Shibizi], turn at the bend if you want to stay close  
to the wall;*

[...]

The song details not only where to go (or rather from where to where) but also how to occupy one's time in the visited locations and what these places were famous for. Thus in the place called Water Climbing Cliff, nuns were 'stealing' monks, indicating immoral and licentious behavior or some such opinion attached to the local Buddhist clergy. The New Brook 新溪子 was a place where the pathway was built high up the river bank and in River-overlooking Town one had to climb the embankment. The place known as Head of the Embankment was famous for a prostitute called Second Aunty Wang who sold wine; another prostitute, Third Aunty Sun sold cakes at the Widow's Grain Port. In a different key, the place called The Moraine of Cave's Guests was said to bring the benevolent aid of a Bodhisattva to those climbing cliffs –mention of it reveals boatmen searching for supernatural aid rather than only for pleasure and entertainment; often this search is answered by a rather unspecified deity, in Sichuan usually addressed as *pusa* 菩薩, Bodhisattva. Calling for help from the supernatural was not the only option available to boat-people. A place called Irrigation Mouth had a station of 'red boats' – an organization involved in protecting and saving people and cargo from scuttled or crashed junks.

It is worth comparing this song with two other examples, which in a manner similar to "Talking of Chongqing," demonstrate a more direct focus on what Sichuan was rich in and how could one derive enjoyment from it. The first one entitled "Sights of Jialing River are as beautiful as brocade" ("Jialingjiang fengguang ru jinxiu" 嘉陵江風光如錦綉) does not in fact mention splendid views but solely delicacies one could taste in various docks on the way:

嘉陵江風光如錦綉, *Sights of Jialing River are as beautiful as brocade,*

個個碼頭有好吃頭。 *Each dock has something delicious to eat.*

南充河街賣沙胡豆，	<i>Nanchong on River Street sells shahu beans,</i> <sup>453</sup>
金溪又出腊豬頭。	<i>Golden Brook [Jinxi] gives cured pig heads.</i>
龍石鎮的豆腐乾香滿口，	<i>Dragon Stone Town [Longshizhen] dry fragrant tofu satisfies</i> <i>one's taste,</i>
川北涼粉拌麻油。	<i>Northern Sichuan bean jelly is mixed with spicy [ma] oil.</i>
袁口的蹄花湯份量够，	<i>[In] Yuankou a portion of hoof-flower soup makes you full,</i> <sup>454</sup>
划算不過冒兒頭。	<i>It is worth less than maoertou.</i> <sup>455</sup>
三匯橙糖亮得透，	<i>Sweetness of oranges from Sanhui shines through,</i>
合川的桃片年深久。	<i>Hechuan peach skins' color is deep when the year turns old.</i>
鹽井溪有個笑和向，	<i>In Salt Well Brook [Yanjingxi] there is a jolly monk,</i>
土沱豆花第一流。	<i>Earthen Pool [Tutuo] tofu flour is of the first rank.</i>
水土賣的是渝北酒，	<i>Muddy Soil [Shuitu] sells wine from north of Yu [Chongqing],</i>
醇香無水醉心頭。	<i>It is pure and mellow in taste.</i>
小麻花出在磁器口，	<i>Sweet egg cakes come from Porcelain Port [Ciqikou],</i>
過路人客口水流。	<i>Those who pass there cannot but slobber.</i>

Almost as if with an ironical pun, this song shows devotion to food as an act of aesthetic connoisseurship, normally reserved for appreciating objects and sights of beauty. The food

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<sup>453</sup> Type of dry beans popular in Chongqing area.

<sup>454</sup> A soup with pork knuckle.

<sup>455</sup> Thick, brown sauce rice noodles.

mentioned is also not of extreme sophistication – rather local produce, such as dry tofu and mellow wine sold, as in one case, by a jovial monk.

A different focus can be seen in the popular *haozi* called “Running Rivers and Lakes” (“Pao jianghu 跑江湖”), which for the most part is a long list of river stations and their renowned products.<sup>456</sup> Here a few lines will suffice:

[...]

“隆昌”生產白麻布，	<i>Flourishing [Longchang] produces white linen;</i>
“自流貢井”花鹽出；	<i>Ziliugong Wells release salt;</i>
“合州”桃片“寶寧”醋，	<i>Hezhou peach slices peel make “Precious and Preferable”</i> <i>[“Baoning”] vinegar,</i>
“金堂”柳煙不馬虎；	<i>Golden hall [Jintang] willow smoke cannot make you confused;</i>
“五通”鍋鹽紅底白口，	<i>Five Passages [Wutong] pots of red salt from the white hole,</i>
“嘉定”城把絲綢出；	<i>Jiading city produces silk;</i>
“宜賓”糟蛋豆腐乳，	<i>Yibing fermented beancurd is like rotten eggs,</i>
“柏樹溪”潮糕油漉漉；	<i>Cypress Brook [Baishuxi] is damp with cake oil;</i>

[...]

Such descriptions of Sichuan reveal the representations expressed by river workers of the environment and social relations they lived in. The choices present in the songs, most notably inclusions and exclusions whether of places, myths or their descriptions are all relevant to our understanding of boatmen’s culture. The ‘maps’ contained in the songs were meant exclusively for the use, knowledge and cultural transmission of the people who engaged in river labor. For that reason, they barely ever move away from the river banks –

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<sup>456</sup> ZGYJC: 11-12.

the places where workers labored or found satisfaction for their social, cultural or physiological needs.

The songs, apart from guiding boatmen through places, also connected particular locations to physical activity, informing where one had to exert ones muscles, where danger lay and where one could rely on human or supernatural help. However, to restrict the meaning of *haozi* only to the realm of direct usefulness would automatically deny their complex meanings. In the same way as other forms of guiding tools, such as guidebooks or geographical treatises, they transmitted aesthetic and cultural meanings and choices. Analyzing them from this perspective, it is fascinating to observe how infrequently Sichuan boatmen's *haozi* addressed or responded to the hegemonic culture and aesthetics of the literati. Occasional references to historical figures or stories constitute only a minuscule part of each tradition. On the other hand, whether reading *haozi* depicting Chongqing and Hechuan or those treating the province, the utilitarian and aesthetic perspective of boatmen prevails and shapes the image of the whole of Eastern Sichuan. The songs were constructed from the elements accessible within the boatmen's means, but also expressed their needs and borders of achievement: whether through consumption, or social and spiritual interaction.



Figure 9: Tongyuanju dock 銅元局, a Yangzi dock in a small river town of Eastern Sichuan (now part of Chongqing Municipality); source: <http://2010.cqlib.cn/Upfile/oldpic/老码头/长江段主要码头/铜元局码头/20世纪初的峡江水码头.jpg>

The most drastic difference between the literary vision and the one presented in *haozi*, however, pertains to the realm of beauty. Compared to an almost millennium long tradition of marvel at the scenic impressiveness of Sichuan landscape expressed through poetry and songs (*zhuzhici*), most notably the Yangzi Gorges, the silence of popular songs is striking. In contrast, the spectacle of beauty to which boatmen were sensible was confined to food and the goods filling urban markets – places seen as fascinating, worth remembering and repeating in song. We should also not forget the fairly down-to-earth humor and irony hidden within the songs, directed at boatmen themselves as much as at other social groups. The world in which river workers interacted and the world of which they were a constituent part was not loaded with moralistic ideas, and the transgressions of certain groups (especially monks, but also the boatmen themselves) were not seen as upsetting. Most importantly, these songs reveal people whose knowledge of the world was broad and



concrete and whose skill in navigating it was superior; people who were careful observers and recorders, whether through need or interest, but most probably both.

## **Chronology, Imagery and Boatmen's World**

Sichuan boatmen's *haozi*, although fascinating and rich in their descriptions of Sichuan 'reality', also bring certain questions to the fore. To what extent did they voice the boatmen's appropriation of the reality surrounding them? We shall examine this problem by evaluating the quality of information the songs contained. The main argument I will advance in this section is that boatmen's *haozi* did not picture any definable historical reality (assuming that late-imperial is an unacceptably broad category of definition). Rather, through exploiting cultural and historical imagery, social memories and concrete elements of experienced reality, these songs expressed the boatmen's vision of the world, adjusted to their social and cultural needs. The songs therefore, apart from serving the function of maps to the province, were also a way for boatmen to occupy their own social space within the surrounding social and spatial world.

I will go on to underline that these appropriations were not unchangeable. In various ways uninterrupted molding of popular culture throughout the twentieth century as well as rapid changes in political and socio-economic conditions resulted in a number of impositions onto a genre that maintained its cultural validity as a work-place tool and popular song tradition till at least the 1960s. For that reason, the dynamic character of *haozi* interacting with the multifaceted changes of the last century was to some degree reflected in their content and in the image of the world they reproduced. Above all, boatmen songs were predominantly pictures of the singers rather than of the objects they sang about. In the latter part of the twentieth century this self-depiction was undergoing historical change. Equally, the sense of history, and the customs, social relations, religiosity, and aesthetics contained in the songs were also changing.

The problem of information quality becomes apparent when we examine the songs in relation to other descriptions of the city and province. First we will look at descriptions of the city and products attached to it, drawing on a number of other sources in order to make

comparisons. Thus we will see whether the information provided about the rapids and beachheads is matched by any other available descriptions of Sichuan.

Perhaps the most curious song, especially for its recent popularity among current aficionados, is “Among Sichuan docks one has to count Chongqing.” The neat categorization of particular objects of trade and the gates where these goods were received does not find much support from any other records from the late eighteenth century till the 1930s (when both gates and docks were restructured to adjust to the needs of car and steamer traffic respectively). There is little indication that trade in salt was conducted solely at Qiansimen or that Nanjimen was marked as the main entry point for groceries. Although there is strong evidence that the trade in other mentioned products such as wood and medicines (one attached to Linjiangmen the other to Chuqimen), was conducted in Chongqing, there is no confirmation that it was exclusively related to those areas of the city at any particular historical time. In the case of medicinal herbs we can presume some relation between the location of *huiguan*, certainly the biggest business establishments in Qing Chongqing, and the port of entry, but this argument is tenuous at best.<sup>457</sup>

Additionally, the location of particular places is also very approximate, which can be exemplified in the case of the Jinzi Gate association with government *yamen*. Chongqing consisted of three administrative levels, Ba County (*xian* 縣), the Eastern Sichuan Circuit (*dao* 道) and the Chongqing Prefecture (*fu* 府) all with their respective compounds occupying most of the lower city. None of the *yamen* were in the direct vicinity of the river, but quite a healthy climb away from the shores of the Yangzi up crooked flights of stairs.<sup>458</sup>

A little more accuracy can be ascribed to the stanzas depicting the ritual practices of the city. Before the urban restructuring conducted by warlord Liu Xiang 劉湘 (1888-1938) and mayor Pan Wenhua 潘文華 (1886-1950) from 1927 till the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, Tongyuanmen indeed exited onto a massive city cemetery. To a degree, similar accuracy permeated the picture of Chaotianmen as a place for official receptions and meet religious

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<sup>457</sup> Till the last decades of nineteenth century the export trade in these goods was channeled through various *huiguan* run by sojourning merchants. In Chongqing they came from: Huguang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Shaanxi, Jiangnan, Guangdong, Baoningfu: Wei Yingtao, 1991: 90-96.

<sup>458</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1761, juan 2: jianshu 建署.

processions. The main city gate was a place of ritual importance, celebrated by literati for its particular scenic values as much as for its historical significance.<sup>459</sup> As the main entrance to Chongqing, it was built above the most active dock, which, placed at the confluence of the Jialing and Yangzi provided a natural landing place for boats traveling on both rivers. Although the ritual functions of the gate were not the main activities performed there they were the most splendid, meaningful and worth-mentioning ones.

It is equally difficult to approach the more detailed description of the city presented in "Talking of Chongqing." Long lists of goods, place names, temples, gates, schools etc. give a semblance of accuracy easily making one believe that it is a reliable guide to the city. All the street names find easy confirmation through careful reading of the Guangxu 12<sup>th</sup> year "Chongqing Prefecture Capital Map" (1886) as well as in the street lists in the Ba County Gazetteer of 1939.<sup>460</sup> Nonetheless, we do not find much confirmation as to whether mentioned areas of the city were in fact those where trade was conducted or whether such sectioning of particular professions was characteristic for Chongqing. Considering that it is possible to confirm the place names recorded in the song for the period stretching from roughly the mid-nineteenth century till the early 1940s, we may assume that the city as represented corresponded to some extent with reality within this one hundred year time frame.<sup>461</sup> Yet, on examination of the economic development of Chongqing from the time it became a treaty port and most prominently from the fall of the Qing, we can see that no new elements of city development are included in the song. Yet these are especially prominent in two fields: marketing structure and production. From at least the beginning of twentieth century we can observe a twin process affecting the urban structure of Chongqing: first, the development of manufacturing and small factories focused on silk-spinning and weaving, production of cotton yarn, bristle, matches, glass, various machine tools, as well as printing; second, the concentration of markets into so-called 'model markets,' though without eliminating local food and fish-markets spread throughout all districts of the city.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> The pleasant view of the Yangzi and Jialing confluence was considered one of the Chongqing beauty sights: *sierjing* 十二景.

<sup>460</sup> Reproduction of the map, see: Chapter 1. *Lao Ditu*: 8-13. *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 229-238.

<sup>461</sup> An expression of discomfort with new street names, and thus proof of common usage of the old names can be found in a 1937 guide to Chongqing: *Chongqing zhinan*, 1944: 33-38.

<sup>462</sup> Wei Yingtao, 1991: 118-139, 189-210.

The fact that none of these changes were included in “Talking of Chongqing” would indicate that the world it describes precedes 1891, the year when Chongqing was designated an ‘open port’ and when large scale restructuring was jump-started. To my mind, however, it is too simplistic to assume that this popular tradition, as others, was simply a photograph of the pre-industrial and also pre-colonial reality. I would claim instead that these traditions represented what was considered a native trade of Sichuan and Chongqing – a source of long-standing urban prosperity and a culturally meaningful symbol of wealth. If we look at the products mentioned in the song such as silk, lead powder, winter bamboo sprouts, cloth quilts, iron pots, chopsticks, foodstuffs, mountain products and medicines we can find in them a statement of Chongqing power over regional trade during the Qing. A curious confirmation of this point comes to light when comparing mentioned goods with taxed positions in the second half of the eighteenth century, including mountain goods, Guangdong goods, medicines, iron pots, porcelain, cotton, silk, groceries, oils, alcohol, corn pepper (ma 麻), pork, bristle etc.<sup>463</sup> Or as Wang Erjian, gazetteer compiler stated in another place: “The produce of all Sichuan [Shu] is concentrated in Chongqing [Yuzhou] flowing to it on three rivers and gathering at this crossroads where innumerable goods can be found[...].”<sup>464</sup> This statement followed a long list of native products such as medicines, porcelain, wooden and bamboo utensils (qi 器), tea, wine and other foodstuffs (beans, bamboo sprouts, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts, spices, etc.). In addition, certain ‘forest goods’ also found their place on the list, such as tiger, panther, jackal, deer, monkey, fox, otter, badger, boar and other furs.<sup>465</sup> The correspondence between the ‘traditional’ trades of Western Sichuan whose pivotal point was Chongqing, and the products mentioned in the songs is quite straightforward. How then should this urban representation be interpreted?

As we can see, what popular traditions repeated was an image of the city transcending the requirements of a guide. As their primary function was to aid recall of places visited, these names were combined with messages that were commonly shared and culturally loaded. In the case of Chongqing it was local urban pride in a prosperous center where all the goods of

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<sup>463</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1761: juan 3: fuyizhi 賦役志: keshui 課稅.

<sup>464</sup> 按渝州物產與全蜀同物之供渝州用者則與全蜀異三江總會水陸橫衢商賈云屯百物翠聚 [...]. *Baxianzhi*, 1761, juan 10: fengtuzhi 風土志: wuchan 物產.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid*: op. cit.

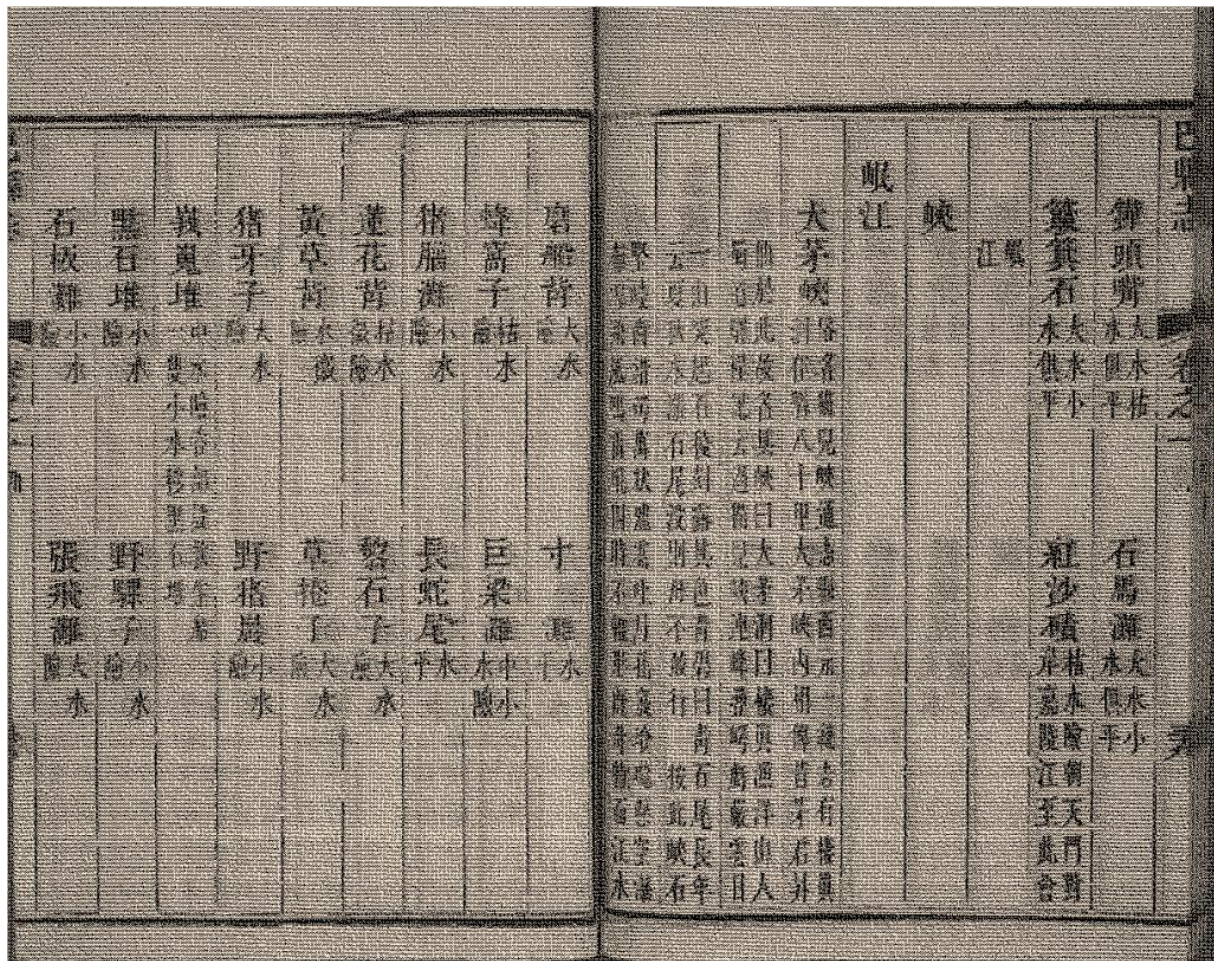
the province were brought together. The goods that filled its markets, from at least the early Qing, proclaimed a sense of beauty which one could marvel at to the same extent as a religious festival or spectacular view. The songs thus did not provide a guide to the markets of the city, but the city as it was imagined, felt, and remembered, ignoring therefore its more recent fluctuations and changes, which more often than not contradicted the previous vision. If we consider that both the traditions analyzed here were gathered in the 1980s, the prevalence of this urban image, rooted in the early glory of eighteenth century prosperity, is quite instructive. It shows clearly the role of popular culture in mirroring the ideas, beliefs and assumptions held by people, rather than in neatly representing the elements of their 'real' material existence.

Songs about the province, although somewhat less informative, are no less interesting. As their role was to help remember dangerous river rapids as well as landing places of interest, they appear as sources of much more pragmatic, perhaps even life-saving knowledge. Interestingly, if compared with official records, the rapids they list are mostly the same, with the difference that some places appear with a slightly changed pronunciation, ex. Zhuyazi (ya – tooth, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone) in *Baxianzhi*, 1761; Zhuyazi (ya – duck, 1<sup>st</sup> tone) in "Shutan."<sup>466</sup> The dissimilarities between an official record published in a county gazetteer and a popular song are visible through the organization of information. The popular tradition linked places and measured their respective difficulty or attractiveness through juxtaposing them with descriptive elements or invocations to deities. In comparison, the gazetteer provided a table, where each name was connected with a respective danger according to season and water height (Figure 10). It did not, however, clearly indicate how to go from one place to another. This reflects a clear difference in approach, whether that of geographic research for the purposes of official circulation or that of direct use as an operational guide useful for work purposes.

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<sup>466</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1761: juan 1: jiangyu 疆域: shanchuan 山川。





Apart from that, the *haozi* depicting the province, to a great extent resembled those which pictured cities. Similarly it is also hard to see the various images they presented as cultural memories and not accurate 'reportage' of life, objects and sights one could meet in Sichuan docks. It is equally difficult to find out what historical period was represented through these songs. Perhaps only one element is indicative as to the late-imperial origin of the words – extremely rare mention of the industrial modes of production and transportation.

Such dating, however, can fairly easily be discarded when we analyze the interests of the songs' authors and listeners. Their focus fell on the areas which not only fascinated but also filled the daily life of river workers, whether they were popular festivals, public executions, markets filled with variety of local delicacies, or brothels where one could find entertainment. Additionally, the people they depicted were quite a stereotypical stock of

characters, not differing much from those commonly known from the popular epic tradition: cheerful often licentious monks, promiscuous Buddhist nuns, or singing prostitutes. The same can be said of the historical-legendary figures: Ba Manzi, Möngke, Zhu Geliang 諸葛亮 (181-234), Xue Rengui 薛仁貴 (613-683) and peoples like the Mongols or Huns (Xiongnu 匈奴).<sup>467</sup> The presence of many notable personalities, although often only roughly related to the environment and history of Sichuan shows an existence and popularity of literary motifs among the boatmen and most probably the impact of storytelling and operas on the work songs.<sup>468</sup>

The existence of literary motifs was not a defining factor of *haozi*, however, since the function of storytelling was secondary to the transmission of geographical knowledge and existing connections between places. It would be also erroneous to assume that elements of historical memory or legendary lore were in some way proof of the songs' authenticity. *Haozi*, together with the professions of Sichuan boatman, interacted with a changing reality and as a genre remained open to various inclusions. Neither the genre nor the form of work on wooden Sichuan boats ceased due to mid-twentieth century political turmoil. As long as the need for traditional forms of shipping existed the songs were adjusted to new realities. We can observe such a process of adjustment among *haozi* in an example song called: "Counting Docks" ("Shu matou" 數碼頭).<sup>469</sup> It is again a description of Chongqing, yet its geographical scope is much larger compared to the traditions we discussed earlier. The borders of interest match, more or less, the extended municipal borders of the capital period (1938-1945), yet some elements are of later date:

朝天門，大碼頭， *Chaotianmen, great dock,*

車來人往不停留。 *Cars come, people go in an incessant flow.*

金字門，南紀門， *Jinzimen, Nanjimen,*

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<sup>467</sup> "跑江湖" "Paojianghu" ZGYJC: 11-12.

<sup>468</sup> See: Introduction and Chapter 5.

<sup>469</sup> *Chuan*: 850-851.

兩個碼頭是近鄰。 *Two docks are close by.*

菜園壩，是車站， *Caoyuanba is a train station,*

火車汽車不斷縈。 *Trains and cars form an unbroken thread.*

[...]

References to car traffic at Chaotianmen as well as a train station in Caoyuanba clearly point to the early years of the People's Republic and the significant effort to modernize Chongqing's transportation system.<sup>470</sup> Further lines are equally revealing as to the economic changes that were taking place in the city as well as to changes in vocabulary at that period:

磁器口，井口站， *Ciqikou – Well Mouth station,*

那是化磁中心站。 *It is a central station for chemical magnets.*

北碚碼頭多靠河， *Beibei dock along the many rivers,*

朝陽北廟和黃葛。 *Chaoyang, Beimiao and Huangge.*

漢渝路，有土灣， *Hanyu Road is on the turn called Tuwan,*

中渡口在小河邊。 *Zhongdu is close to the Small River [Jialing].*

[...]

The song testifies also to the expansion of the city – previous independent administrative units have now become simply city districts and no mention is made of their past. Moreover it demonstrates the loss of the individual character of many places as their traits disappeared under reconstruction and adjustment to the needs of an industrializing economy. No longer are they associated with people, customs or goods unique to the place, but rather all fall under one category: 'cargo dock' (*banyun matou* 搬運碼頭). The same can

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<sup>470</sup> The first rail line in Chongqing, the Chengdu-Chongqing railway (Cheng Yu tielu 成渝鐵路) was built between December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1949 and July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952. Zheng Jingdong, Zhu Peilin, Fu Zhou: 293.



be said of streets and alleys (jie 街, wan 灣, etc.), which from being pedestrian spaces lined with workshops and stalls became transit routes utilized by cars and trucks (HanYu lu 漢渝路 – Hankou-Chongqing highway).

[...]

龍門浩，海棠溪， *Longmenhao, Haitengxi,*

它們都在南岸區。 *They are in the South Shore District.*

彈子石，搬運站， *Danzishi, cargo dock,*

兩個都在江南面。 *Both are on the same side of the Yangzi.*

搬運碼頭說完了， *Of cargo docks, I finished to talk,*

三十三個莫得少。 *There are thirty three of them in all.*

[...]

As this example shows, the content of description and represented reality could be altered quite drastically with changing circumstances. Only the songs' form and function were rigid – they were to facilitate memorization of places creating lasting and culturally valid images and including in them the basic and necessary characteristics of each place described. We can see that there was no single valid representation of any one place, but representations could be changed as long as they conveyed the intended meaning and were in agreement with the picture of the province held by the river workers. This flexibility of meanings shows that *haozi*, although outwardly presenting a quite stable description of Sichuan, in fact mirrored the cultural milieu of the boatmen. In other words, they were descriptions of 'their' world, in the form they saw, imagined and remembered it. The validity of images was examined not through observation and assessment, but through the act of matching with memories, presumptions, hopes and imaginings held by the workers about the world they lived in. If the songs were in fact images of the workers more than of the province, it is crucial to ask whether we can consider them a form of boatmen's professional

knowledge, an indispensable tool of their craft, which distinguished them from other professions.

To answer this question, I would point to two factors characteristic of these popular traditions. First, these songs were successful mnemonic tools, helping boatmen to memorize long mental maps of the complex river system of the province. For work groups, such as boatmen, it was a necessary and highly important skill, since they had to navigate through often dangerous rivers without the aid of any charts apart from the most rudimentary signaling systems. The ability to map and recall large sections of the province was also a unique skill for these workers, as other members of the lower classes, urban or rural, did not exercise any comparable geographic mobility. In order to help in this cross-provincial movement as well as to ensure that it was not automatically synonymous with exposure to danger, Sichuan river workers devised complex methods of memorization and imagination of space and time which was bound up with progression through consecutive steps on their way. Considering this perspective, we can assume that *haozi* in fact constituted a form of craft knowledge.

Second and above all, boatmen's work songs were forms of popular culture in that they voiced the boatmen's usage and appropriation of the space in which they existed. Even though they had a directly utilitarian purpose, they also transmitted a rich load of cultural images, which provided social and cultural representation of the workers themselves. Descriptions of places were very often bound up with expressions of aesthetic and cultural choices as well as the social preferences and limitations of the Sichuan boatmen. Their humorous and at times satirical viewpoint, proclivity for bawdy, noisy, and doubtfully moral activities; their excitement with festivals and celebrations, whether executions or funerals, as well as their enthusiasm for food and drink, with near total ignorance of literary aesthetics and models testify to a particular preference and horizon of cultural engagement. The boatmen's liking for 'vulgar' and 'unsophisticated' activities, clear ignorance and more or less conscious denial of a literary sense of beauty points toward the gap in aesthetic sensibilities that existed between social classes as well as limited transfer of elite tastes in late-imperial and Republican Sichuan. On the other hand, a quite developed awareness and ease in usage of certain literary motifs and knowledge of local history would suggest that

boatmen did not exist outside the mainstream of contemporary culture, and more precisely of urban culture.

*Haozi* are also revealing as to the way boatmen imagined the world surrounding them. Above all, they open to us a window through which we can view river workers' perception of history and history's interaction with daily experience. The extent to which a mythical imagery persisted in the songs is not surprising, though not all the images are as obvious as those pertaining to major heroes of popular tradition. As I tried to point out, the very representation of Chongqing and Sichuan, with its wealth, points of interest and beauty was couched in terms of objects and acts of symbolic value, irrespective of whether we consider local rituals or regional products. The symbolic value of images of the province was in fact consistent with the very purposes of the song – turning temporal physical space into a lasting and memorable objects and also proclaiming the boatmen's appropriation of these objects. Appropriation meant constructing, using and adjusting reality to the particular needs and worldviews of boatmen's singers.



# CHAPTER 5: WHERE DO WE BELONG?

## MEANING OF ONESELF AND ONE'S MENIAL WORK WITHIN SICHUAN SOCIETY

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Academic approaches to both Sichuan popular traditions and labor conditions in the years preceding the communist takeover have fallen victim to overly politicized interpretations. Too little effort has been spent on trying to understand the voices emerging from Sichuan popular culture; instead the focus has fallen on the exploitation inscribed in the class and institutional framework of the “old society.” Such narratives, mostly framed within a discourse of ‘speaking bitterness’ (*suku* 訴苦), a broad notion describing the conditions of the working classes (workers, peasants, soldiers) in pre-Liberation times, underlined the exploitative nature of the mercantile-capitalist economy. The institutionalized class relations within Chinese society were seen as the main source of material hardship and spiritual misery experienced by the working classes. Consequently popular culture was a voice (or a scream) of suffering and a call for revolutionary change allowing these groups to regain their self-respect.<sup>471</sup>

Taking such a vantage point, however, is highly misleading and counterproductive in our case. Relying on a ready-made interpretation of lower class perceptions of their conditions within the workplace, and society in general, makes it difficult to see the whole complicated nature of the workers’ view of their social conditions. The main aim of this chapter is to challenge such assumptions by exploring boatmen’s songs as representations of workers’ self-perception within late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Sichuan society. In my

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<sup>471</sup> “Speaking bitterness” advanced as a project of recording and publishing oral narratives, which expressed injustice and cruelty of the so called “old society” (*jiushehui* 舊社會, pre-1949) and happiness from the gains of the revolution that uprooted the old social order. Ann Anagnost stated “[t]he narrative structure of “speaking bitterness” provides a new frame for the reworking of consciousness in which the speaker comes to recognize himself or herself as a victim of an immoral system rather than a bearer of bad fate or personal shortcoming. In other words, one had to recognize one’s conditions of existence in terms of class antagonism.” Ann Anagnost. 1997. *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*. Durham: Duke University Press: 29. This form of narrative is particularly vivid in the authoritative editions like *Wenshi ziliao* 文史資料 [Sources for Culture and History]. For Sichuan, see: *Sichuan wenshiziliao jicui*, Vol. 6.

view, boatmen had a very critical view of their life and work conditions and did not remain entirely passive to their reality. Relying on quite a rich textual tradition they projected their own misery in an exaggerated manner as people deprived of all social elements of humanness. At the same time, with sarcastic and even satirical words, they ridiculed their condition and the whole social order, producing an image in which all efforts at improving oneself are doomed to fail. While bemoaning and ridiculing their social standing, boatmen also expressed pride in their work and their group values based on brotherhood. This maneuver of turning what was unacceptable into what was respectable was possible due to the rich oral tradition thriving in late-imperial China, which was also accessible to Eastern Sichuan boatmen. For example, the stories of bandit heroes and knight-errants, whose life situation and moral values had drifted far from orthodox norms, gave enough intellectual ammunition for boatmen to see themselves in a more positive light.

We can understand boatmen's work songs through the idea developed by James C. Scott as a form of "hidden transcript." Scott defined it as a "discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond the direct observation of powerholders. [...] It consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript."<sup>472</sup> The "public transcript" conversely is "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate."<sup>473</sup> Although I am not intending to criticize Scott's claims, there were some important differences between boatmen's *haozi* and the clandestine voices researched by Scott. Firstly, work songs were uttered publically, straight in the face of possible class oppressors.<sup>474</sup> Secondly, by employing imagery derived from a well-known corpus of narratives, *haozi* expressed concerns broader than those pertaining only to Sichuan boatmen. At the same time, these concerns were quite standardized, and thus partially departed from the narrow experience of the trackers and rowers. Thirdly, partly due to their public character, *haozi* were not calls for change to the social standing of the boatmen, but rather realizations of how lowly this status was. Bemoaning the miserableness of life, however, brought with it some degree of acceptance and accommodation. On the following pages, we will see how this was done and what it meant.

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<sup>472</sup> James C. Scott. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 4-5.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>474</sup> They were heard and known by anyone who ever sat on a boat in Sichuan. See: Chapter 3.

## “Boatmen’s life is a real tragedy”

### Cold, Hunger, Loneliness and Exploitation

Boatmen formulated the meaning of their misery through pictures of bodily suffering and mental distress. The songs stated that Sichuan trackers and rowers were haunted by four interrelated scourges: cold, hunger, loneliness and the brutality of their bosses. If some of these sources of sorrow may have been caused by bad work conditions, it is interesting to see that in many *haozi* they were connected to exploitation by the bosses. The pain inflicted by the environmental hazards of boatmen’s work only came in second place. Additionally, it was not exploitation understood as demanding excessive work for disproportionate remuneration, but simply the insufficient provision of food. All these grudges come together in the song “Boss beats us, boss swears at us” (老闆打來老闆罵, “Laoban dalai laoban ma”).<sup>475</sup>

老闆打來老闆罵,     *Boss beats us, boss swears at us,*

八股篾繩肩上拉。     *Eight strings of bamboo rope we pull up.*

拉霜落雪要下水,     *In the frost and falling snow [he] makes us tow standing in the water,*

逢岩跳坎眼睛花。     *Facing rocks and jumping ridges makes our eyes blur.*

上水一月半斗米,     *Up river is one month and half a dou of rice,*<sup>476</sup>

吃飯只能吃鍋巴。     *What we eat is just a rice crust [glued to the bowl].*

婆娘兒女光眼看,     *We have barely seen our wives and children,*

日子不如牛和馬。     *Our lives are worse than that of cattle and horses.*

This song outlines the deprivations suffered by trackers, and accuses the boss, *laoban* 老闆, of inflicting them. The boss is not identified in the song, and could mean either an employer

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<sup>475</sup> ZGYJC: 20.

<sup>476</sup> *Dou* – approximately 10 liters.

or an overseer, depending on the size of the vessel.<sup>477</sup> Although it is quite explicit that he was not the only source of evil suffered by the workers, the blame still falls on him. The argument goes that boatmen's labor is hard as it consists of pulling the boat up the river partially submerged in cold water (most of tracking was done during the drier winter months). Yet it was the boss, who cruelly pushed workers to perform such work, and not so much the nature of the work itself. The same theme is repeated in the next stanzas. To be a tracker in Sichuan meant "facing rocks and jumping ridges" but in the song, this statement is immediately followed by more finger-pointing at the "boss" who pays only "half a dou of rice" and feeds his workers with leftovers. Moreover, performing such miserable work meant parting from one's family for long periods – this again could be blamed on the employer who did not ensure humane conditions of work.



Figure 11: Boatmen taking rest in front of a Xintan rapid (青灘) in Yangzi Gorges; photo: Fritz Weiss. Source: Wyss: 30-31.

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<sup>477</sup> About various sizes of boats see: Chapter 1.



Not all the songs are so forthright in accusing the “bosses” of causing all the evil related to boatmen’s work and life. Rather more precise statements prevailed and accusations were substantiated with concrete images of deprivation. To start with, we will look at one of the most publicized *haozi* called “What boss is not black-hearted” (哪個老闆不黑心, “Nage laoban bu heixin”).<sup>478</sup> It shows that the conditions of employment were seen as deleterious to any possibility of making a decent living.

哪個老闆不黑心?    *What boss is not black-hearted?*

哪個大爺不整人?    *What ‘uncle’ does not entrap people?*

天高河長無路走,    *Heavens [are] high, rivers [are] long [and yet] nowhere to go,*

地寬山多難立身。    *The Earth is narrow, mountains [are] countless, [too] difficult to make a living.*

The song charges two different types of people with predatory behavior and exploitative practices: “bosses” and “uncles” (*daye* 大爺). The “bosses” were, as in the previous *haozi*, people with whom boat workers had the most direct contact, namely petty boat owners or supervisors/captains employed to direct their labor. The “uncles” on the other hand were the members of secret societies directly engaged in procuring labor for the boats.<sup>479</sup> These two types of people, having relatively superior status, according to the song engaged in various forms of squeeze. The former were simply black-hearted, which can be understood as aggressive and cruel, mistreating boatmen during work. The latter, as we can assume on the basis of known employment practices in late-imperial and republican Sichuan, exercised their power through controlling workers’ access to the labor market extracting fees in exchange for assuring employment.<sup>480</sup> The word “entrap” (*zheng* 整), however, indicates an

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<sup>478</sup> ZGYJC: 21.

<sup>479</sup> ‘Uncle’ (大爺, *daye*) referred to a local secret society boss ZGYJC: 21; Cai: 485; Wei Juxian 衛聚賢. 1949. *Zhongguode banghui qing hong han liu* 中國的幫會青紅漢留. Chongqing: Wei Juxian faxing: Shuowenshe chuban: di er pian 第二篇, di yi zhang 第一章: 13. *Zheng* 整 is a Chongqing dialect for *kenghai* 坑害 – frame, entrap. According to: ZGYJC: 21.

<sup>480</sup> See also Chapter 1 for discussion on employment practices. Similar conditions, springing from a sharp division of labor and a large pool of impoverished workers always accessible for hiring, touched boatmen in

even deeper form of dependence – one in which a person is permanently caught in an unequal and ultimately harmful relationship, but whose position, however miserable, can only be maintained through this relationship.

This point can be substantiated through careful reading of the last two lines of the song. They present a vision of natural obstacles, which are impossible to overcome (“Earth is narrow, mountains are countless”), yet this is immediately juxtaposed with an image meaning that boatmen were conscious of different ways of living (“heavens are high, rivers are long”). This contrast leads to the final point – there was no way a boatman could “establish oneself within a society” (*lishen* 立身). Logically, according to the *haozi*, boatmen existed outside the society and had no respectability, since it was taken from them by the “boss” and the “uncle”, two figures who towered over them and defined their destiny.

The problem of food and cold were not always directly connected to exploitation by superiors, but could exist independently, as defining elements of boatman labor. Yet even when *haozi* did not have a tone of direct accusation, more veiled ways of bemoaning injustice were exercised. That was especially clear when wages and food rations (which constituted part of the payment) were the subject of songs.<sup>481</sup> What boatmen viewed as particularly unjust was the difference in payment between voyages up and down the Yangzi. Trips down river gave them a fair chance of making some profit, whereas going up river left many boatmen penniless and compelled to carry on their miserable work. “In the cold winter months” (十冬腊月天氣寒, “*Shidonglayue tianqi han*”) expresses such feelings with particular clarity:<sup>482</sup>

十冬腊月天氣寒,     *In the cold winter months,*

哥兒幫人去拉船,     *Brothers, associates go pull the boat,*

上水半月一斗米,     *Up river, half a month and one dou or rice,*

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other regions of China. Robert J. Antony. 2003. *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies: 76-81.

<sup>481</sup> Wages in food were typical on the China coast in the first half of the nineteenth century; Antony: op.cit.

<sup>482</sup> ZGYJC: 35.

下水十天一秤鹽。 *Down river, ten days and a cheng of salt.*<sup>483</sup>

The song focuses on two difficult elements of boatmen life and as in previous cases treats them as unchangeable, “natural” characteristics of workers’ lives. River labor took place predominantly in the winter months and as a result cold was the common experience. Yet mentioned discrepancies in wages on routes up and down the river, although not expressed as accusations, function in fact as sources of discontent in a wretched existence. The fact that Sichuan boatmen were meagerly paid on their route back home (“up river”) indicates another form of economic entrapment – the impossibility of leaving the profession, without abandoning one’s home (Sichuan).

The problems of food and wages find much clearer expression, however, when *haozi* were rendered in the form of an accusation. Since it was entirely in the power of captains and boat-owners to decide what meals were served to the workers, the quality of food often suffered from rampant corner cutting. Stingy bosses were infamous for buying rotten food and feeding it to their workers, as expressed in a work song called “Drawing near the wharf talk” (接頭話, “Jie tou hua”),:

[...]

老闆莫把風流賣, *The boss never buys sophisticated fare,*

菜子開花要長苔。 *Opening the food basket one sees it already overgrown with moss.*<sup>484</sup>

The situation appeared to be so bad that one song titled “A Talk” (說子, “Shuo zi”) lambasted the horrible taste and pitiful quantity of food rations, suggesting that only fools (*shazi* 傻子) would ever put up with such treatment:

親友見了歪嘴子, *When close friends saw it they turned their mouths away,*

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<sup>483</sup> *Cheng* 秤: ten *jin* 斤: 5 kg. According to: ZGYJC: 35.

<sup>484</sup> ZGYJC: 29.

改行無門只有受苦當傻子. *With no way to change occupation, one can only suffer bitterness and be a fool.*<sup>485</sup>

The life of the boatmen was considered painful, yet much greater grief was brought by unemployment. Many songs conveyed fears of being dismissed by their previous bosses in Yichang, Hubei, about a month's travel away from Sichuan. "Shuo zi" put it this way:

[...]

船到宜昌老闆端甌子,      *The boat reaches Yichang, our boss fires us.*

同川沙鍋搭籃子,      *Sichuan clay pot carries a basket,*

[...]

'Clay pot' is a reference to the people of Sichuan, who needed to come back home, which meant finding any work that would provide enough food to survive on the way.<sup>486</sup> The song expressed the fear of unemployment – it was much better to do back-breaking labor than to be left without and thus return home without any income. Whatever the difficulties of the job, according to *haozi* it was not possible to survive without performing it, nor was there much opportunity to escape it as one never had enough money to free oneself of the predatory job market.

The tropes presented above formed a stock of repetitive images that described the boatmen's struggle with their menial work as well as their lowly social standing. The *haozi* do not leave much doubt as to the brutal shortcomings of boatmen's work, which left workers vulnerable to often greedy and exploitative employers, pitifully low wages, and insufficient provision of food. These factors, however, only partially explain the scale of self-depreciation exercised by Sichuan river workers. It seems that to a much higher degree, scornful self-description was derived from a different source, namely from an inability to fulfill one's social duties with regard to the family. The next section will be devoted to this question.

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<sup>485</sup> ZGYJC: 36.

<sup>486</sup> ZGYJC: 36.

## Elders, Marriage, Children as Reasons for Shame

Working for most of the year far away from one's place of origin was a source of constant pain suffered by Sichuan boatmen. It was not only nostalgia for people and places one was familiar or grew up with, but also a sense of failure in fulfilling the obligations due to one's family: elders, wife, and children. There was a widespread understanding of Confucian morals enshrined in the Five Relationships (*wulun* 五倫) which established a benchmark for defining one's social standing, but also posed moral demands on each person in all periods of life. In other words, failure to live up to the expectations set within the Confucian moral code could be source of major psychological tension for anybody living within late-Imperial society, and a cause of social ostracism.<sup>487</sup> Interestingly, Sichuan boatmen's understanding of family relations was not highly sophisticated and certainly the expressions of filial piety available to the elites were far outside their means or perhaps even needs.<sup>488</sup> On the other hand, boatmen bemoaned the fact that their much more intimate and personal family relations were impeded by work. Moreover, the fact of having broken family lives was not presented free from accusations directed at those who organized their work and made it so intolerable. Thus, problems of family life were one of the elements in a whole list of grievances expressed by the river workers; in fact, probably the strongest and most painful one. The *haozi* "To scrape along I am made to pull the boat" (為了活命把船拉, "Weile huoming ba chuan la") offers us an excellent insight into this issue.<sup>489</sup>

脚蹬頭頭手爬沙,    *Step by step, hands and legs, [I] climb in sand,*

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<sup>487</sup> Failure to live up to an expected role of a filial son was one of the main Chinese literary tropes reaching popular culture at least from the times of the Tang 唐 (618-907) through flourishing short stories. For an example and analysis see: Timothy C. Wong. "Self and Society in Tang Dynasty Love Tales," *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (January. – March, 1979): 95-100.

<sup>488</sup> From the end of Han dynasty expressions of filial piety, such as funeral rituals, mourning, celebrations of lineage ancestors, construction of ancestral halls, and maintaining genealogies were all forms of elite construction and manifestations of high social status. Similarity in form did not mean that the composition of imperial elites went unchanged over centuries. Timothy Brook. "Funerary Ritual and The Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Dec., 1989): 465-499. For an overview of the development of kinship practices in imperial China and bibliography, see: Mark Edward Lewis. 2009. *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 170-183. Mark Edward Lewis. 2009. *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 189-206. Dieter Khun. 2009. *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 148-154. Timothy Brook. 2010. *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 134-160.

<sup>489</sup> *Chuan*: 899.

為了活命把船拉。 *To scrape along I am made to pull the boat,*

日歇沙灘之上， *Day of rest on the sandy beach,*

爬行亂石沓見。 *[And then] climbing up in a confused stony nook.*

妻守有夫之寡， *Wife guarded by a husband as if she was widow,*

夫犯無罪之法。 *Husband a bandit without breaking the law.*

吃的是鬼魂之飯， *Food – the fare of ghosts,*

穿的是疤上重疤。 *Clothes – just a scar on a scar.*

拉又難得拉， *To pull and yet it is so hard to pull,*

拉起同去做莊稼。 *And pulling [I] come back home to tend to the crops.*

The feelings expressed in the songs, in spite of being to a degree formulaic seem more personal and less standardized than prescribed Confucian relations could have been. Instead they merge with a view on oneself as a boatman leading the life of a bandit or beggar, leaving one's wife abandoned. The self-depreciation was indivisible from failed family life. The last line offers some additional explanation as to the moral and social standpoint from which these woes should be seen – the reference to the life of farmers organized around the household, seasonal work and festivals is presented both as a dream and as a solution to the boatmen's suffering. This song was by no means alone in stating the superiority of peasant life above that of a river worker. A large body of traditions acted as a reminder that every year and therefore all of human existence only made sense when mapped out by nature, work and celebrations, which allowed family and community to prosper.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> An example of such is "Twelve months song" (十二月歌), which lists an appropriate work or celebration for each month of the rural calendar. ZGYJC: 44.

For boatmen the seasons were not busy with farm work and the observation of nature. Any seasonal differences were obliterated by the monotony of labor. One song called “Year round we climb the rapids” (一年四季灘上爬, “Yinian siji tanshangpai”):<sup>491</sup>

脚蹬石頭手扒沙,     *Stepping forward, stones in hand, digging the sand,*

八股索索肩上拉。     *Rustling rope strings we pull with our shoulders.*

打霜落雪把雨下,     *Biting frost, snow and rain fall on us,*

一年四季灘上爬。     *Year round we climb the rapids.*

周身骨頭累散架,     *Tired body and bones all fall apart.*

爬岩跳坎眼睛花。     *Climbing cliffs, jumping ridges that blur your eyes.*

誰要稍稍鬆口氣,     *The one who wants to relax just for a bit,*

頭腦打罵真凶煞。     *His head is hit, sworn by a demon.*

船工終年如牛馬,     *A Boat-worker by year's end is no more than cattle and horses,*

不敬糊口難養家。     *With no respect for livelihood, it is hard to feed your family.*

As we saw before the description of the boatmen's misery starts from all the physical pain they suffer such as from natural obstacles (stones and sand), cold, and muscle pain from pulling the rope etc. Then the song moves on to another scourge, a boss who cruelly beats and swears at the workers and who is so spiteful that he even deserves to be compared to a demon (*xiongsha* 凶煞). Finally, the last two lines explain the consequences of such treatment - being a boatman means living like a beast, and failing to provide for one's family.

Failing to provide care for one's family in fact creates a sense of dehumanization inscribed in the phrase “like cattle and horses” (如牛馬, *ru niuma*). As Stephen A. Smith recognized, in a

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<sup>491</sup> ZGYJC: 19.

book on Shanghai workers, the issue of humane treatment and perceiving oneself no better than a beast was central to class and national struggles in late-Qing and Republican Shanghai. He underlined that the denigrating view of the self was not only influenced by economic factors but also by “injustices of recognition” – the feeling of being looked down upon, not respected and handicapped within an institutionalized social structure.<sup>492</sup> In the Sichuan *haozi* the issue of national struggle and survival is conspicuously absent. The problem of class conflict, as shown above, is quite visible but requires a few words of explanation. Most songs not only blamed the bosses for their misery, but also complained about the natural environment (river, cliffs, towing paths, etc.). It was thus the very nature of the job, which separated them from families, friends, and associates that turned boatmen into dehumanized, beast-like creatures. *Haozi* expressed this suffering, which was not about physical hardship but about belittlement in the eyes of other social groups and, in fact, of the workers themselves.

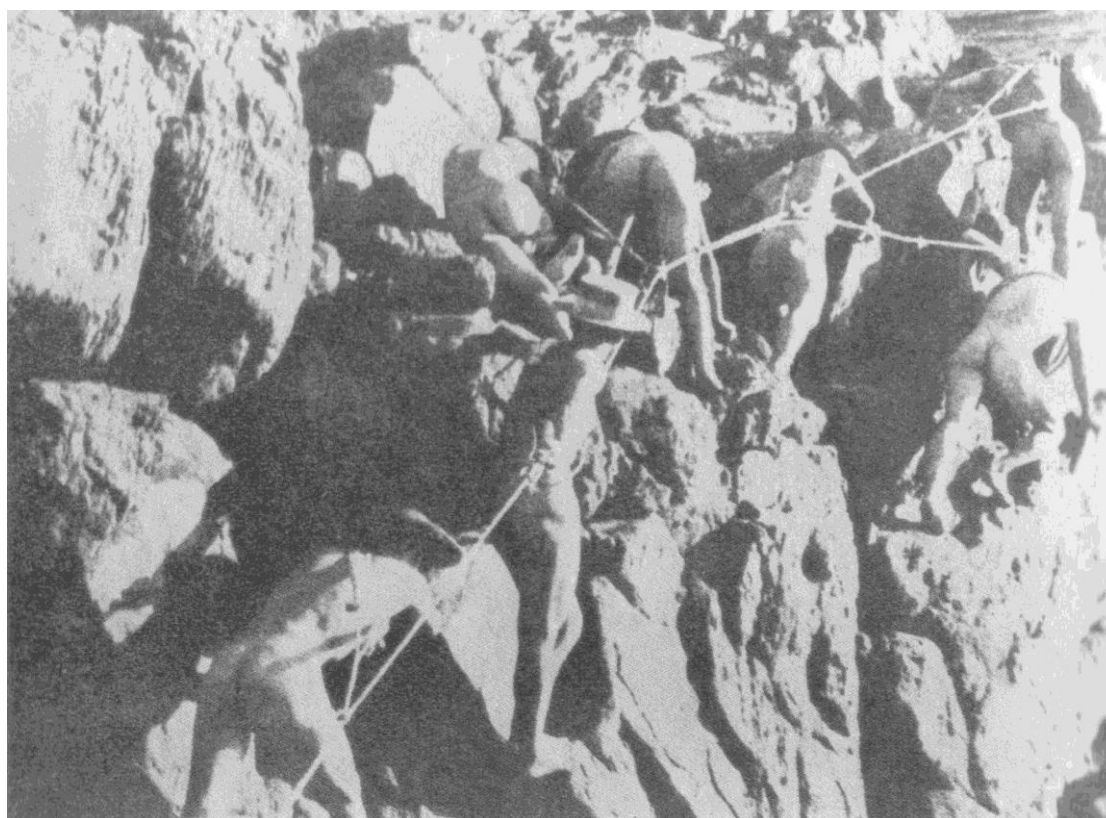


Figure 12: Naked trackers struggling up a rocky tow path; probably 1920s or 1930s: <http://2010.cqlib.cn/Upfile/oldpic/老码头/长江段主要码头/白帝城古码头/一个世纪前，一艘艘船只就是这样拉过峡谷到重庆.jpg>

<sup>492</sup> S. A. Smith: 268-269.



The sense of dehumanization was especially galling when aggravated by the realization that they were transgressing established taboos relating to appearance and behavior. One of the most powerful traditions of this kind was a song entitled “Boat-workers’ life is a real tragedy” (船工的生活真悲慘“Chuangong shenghuo zhen beican”).<sup>493</sup>

我们船工的生活真悲慘,     *Our boat-workers’ life is a real tragedy,*

風裡來雨裡去牛馬一般。     *In the wind, in the rain we go like common cattle and horses.*

拉激流走遍了懸岩陡坎,     *Pulling through, we cross rapids and steep cliffs,*

頭腦打頭腦罵血汗吸乾。     *Our heads are struck, they swear in our face, [our] blood and sweat is sucked dry.*

衣無領褲無襠難把人見,     *No clothes, no pants, bare crotch, for people we are unsightly,*

生了病無人管死在沙灘。     *When we grow sick, nobody treats us, we meet death on the sandy beach.*

船打爛葬魚腹屍體難見,     *The boat goes to pieces and our corpses disappear in fish stomachs,*

拋父母棄妻兒眼淚流乾。     *Abandoned parents, abandoned wife and children; even tears dry out.*

The boatmen, as they saw it, really did offend the eyes of onlookers (Figure 12). Their bodies were naked while at work and in their labor there was nothing worth respect. Their death or injury (see: Chapter 6) was equally exposed to public view and disgrace, with a sick and overworked body left to rot and be devoured by beasts or fish. The tragic element, however, again stresses family relations, as each of life’s stages, from birth to death, should be

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<sup>493</sup> ZGYJC: 24.

experienced within the close kinship group.<sup>494</sup> The boatmen, however, living and dying far away from their relatives failed to uphold this principle. Even if they maintained families, or cared for and supported their parents with their earnings, this song expresses a profound sense of pain derived from the conflicting necessities of migratory work and lifestyle and the conviction of a moral obligation to remain physically present with one's family.

Their bleak social and economic standing gave rise to a range of voices, uttering dissatisfaction, despair and degeneration. Boatmen's moans and frustration were expressed in language burdened with tropes and metaphors of a locally varied but, also, more generally recognizable kind. Many songs frequently combined various sets of stereotypical and standardized images including: exploiting boss, difficult environment, bad weather, scarcity of food, and separation from the family. Although often repetitive, we should not assume that they were devoid of meaning and reference to workers' conditions, state of mind, and modes of interpreting reality.

Following James Scott's idea of the "hidden transcript", we should see in these songs not mere complaint at one's social and work condition. To express one's dissatisfaction was already an act of opposition to it, an assumption, however limited, of control over one's own destiny. Singing of misery and as we know, singing very loudly and publicly about it allowed workers to assert their position in the face of their exploiters and regain some vestiges of self-respect, which work on the rivers of Sichuan was taking from them. I would claim that although the picture boatmen painted of themselves in the *haozi* was extremely bleak, it was the very act of publicly articulating this image that constituted an act of resistance.

### **Laughing at Oneself and Ridiculing Others: The Boatmen's Sarcastic Vision of Society**

The boatmen not only bewailed their low social status, cruel treatment on the part of the bosses, or frosty narrow tow paths. Their work songs often turned directly to criticizing the society they lived in by creating sarcastic images. Different techniques were employed. In some cases it was done by juxtaposing the boatmen with celestial beings and the more

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<sup>494</sup> Jordan Paper, Lawrence G. Thompson, eds. 1998. *The Chinese Way in Religion*, Second Edition. Wadsworth Publishing Company: 30-53.

respectable classes of society. In others, it was by describing the whole society and exposing its rather dismal record of shattered dreams and social degradation.

One of the songs clearly marking the boatmen's vision of the place they occupied within society was "Heaven belongs to Earth and Earth to Heaven" (天連地來地連天, "Tianliandilai diliantian"):<sup>495</sup>

天連地來地連天,      *Heaven belongs to Earth and Earth to Heaven,*

龍連滄海鳳連山。      *Dragon belongs to blue seas [and] Phoenix to mountains.*

佛祖連的雷音寺,      *Buddha belongs to the Thunder Sounding Temple,*

觀音連的普陀山。      *Guan Yin belongs to the Putuo Mountain.*

讀書人連筆硯,      *Literati belong with ink stone,*

生意買賣連算盤。      *Traders belong with abacus.*

下力人連扁担,      *Those with muscles belong to a shoulder pole,*

河下船工連篙竿。      *The river workers belong to a punt-pole.*

The song follows an idea that every element in the universe belongs to another and is fulfilled by it. After listing a number of such relationships common in popular culture, such as Heaven and Earth, dragon and phoenix etc., the *haozi* proceeds to list various professions and objects characteristic to them. The last two lines refer to workers. It says that strong people are prescribed the shoulder pole and river people the punt-pole. An interesting element of the song is that the particular jobs are linked to stable and unchangeable cultural relationships, such as those of Heaven or dragons and phoenixes. The song therefore indicates that a boatman is assigned to his work eternally, as if chained to his punt pole, he has nothing else to look for.

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<sup>495</sup> ZGYJC: 18.

The idea of confinement within one's class and the related futility of any efforts leading to social advancement was perhaps one of the most firmly established elements of Sichuan river culture. It found expression not only in statements of resignation as to one's opportunities for social advancement, but also in ridiculing those who ever harbored such ambitions. There is no space here to present the full texts of songs expressing such sentiments, a number of quotations will have to suffice.

According to one of the most famous boatmen *haozi* "Among Sichuan Docks One Needs to Count Chongqing" (四川省水碼頭要數重慶, "Sichuansheng Matou Yaoshu Chongqing), the temple of the god Zhen Wu 真武 (Real Warrior; alternative name: Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝) epitomized dreams of a career:

對着那真武山魚跳龍門。 *Turning to this Zhen Wu Mountain fish [hopes] to leap through the dragon gate.*<sup>496</sup>

The song repeats a well-known proverb (鯉魚跳龍門 *liyu tiao longmen* – the carp jumps the dragon gate), which expresses the hopes of those who, hailing from modest social background and unable to pay for a proper education, dream of succeeding in the imperial examinations and therefore receiving an official post ("dragon gate"). Becoming an official was one of the most popularly expressed dreams and a synonym for personal accomplishment worthy of the highest recognition, as a successful candidate not only improved his own but also his family's lot. Nowhere, however, do *haozi* mention the role of individual effort, instead they summarize the whole dream as being in the sole power of godly intervention. Another song, "Talking of Chongqing (說重慶, "Shuo Chongqing) develops this idea in more detail:

[...]

兩條河圍繞着重慶山城。 *Two rivers embrace the mountain city of Chongqing.*

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<sup>496</sup> ZGYJC: 2.

真武山鐵桅杆永鎮巴郡，	<i>Zhenwu Mountain [Zhenwushan] – Peak of Iron Masts overlooks Ba Prefecture,</i>
新年時朝山客求簽敬神。	<i>At New Year pilgrims flock to it to worship the god.</i>
重慶城景致多難以說盡，	<i>Chongqing's beauty spots are so many that one can talk without end,</i>
最奇怪笑人窮不笑人淫。 <sup>497</sup>	<i>The strangest though is that people ridicule the poor and not the immoral.</i>

Zhen Wu was considered a special protector of the city to whom people turned during the most important holiday in the Chinese religious calendar (see: Figure 13). In the song his role seems to have been elevated above other cults (at least for the social group in question).<sup>498</sup> The binary role of Zhen Wu, as protector and giver of hope, appears in this song very vividly. At the same time, this representation is immediately challenged as the reality of Chongqing social conditions was inimical to the poor, and thus the efficacy of the god is called into question. Nevertheless, on the basis of the presented *haozi*, it would be difficult to argue that it was Zhen Wu who was to blame and therefore to be scorned by the workmen singers. It seems rather that putting one's hopes in an unrealistic goal was in itself to be considered a folly, irrespective of any help the heavenly powers could rally. Another song called "Zhen Wu Mountain, Zhen Wu Cliff" (真武山, 真武岩 "Zhen Wu Shan, Zhen Wu Yan") clarifies this issue:

真武山，真武岩， *Zhen Wu Mountain, Zhen Wu Cliff,*

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<sup>497</sup> ZGYJC: 9.

<sup>498</sup> This tradition finds confirmation also outside popular tradition. It was mentioned in a 1933 Guide to Chongqing: "[Among] discontinued New Year's celebrations, on the first month second, third etc. days, women, men, old [and] young, all liked to go to the top of the Zhen Wu Mountain, visit Laojundong 老君洞 [The Cave of the Old Lord], and other locations on the Southern Mountains [Nanshan 南山]. This one location contains nine of them [temples]. Superstitious people while there enter temples and burn incense." Tang Youfeng: 95. The tradition was still remembered, if not practiced, during the War of Resistance (1937-1945). According to Du Ruozhi, people prayed at Zhen Wu Mountain for good fortune during the coming year ([...] 以象徵把今年的財運帶回去了). Du Ruozhi: 59-60.

文官去了武官來； *Civil official goes, military official comes;*

文官背時寫對子， [When] *civil official meets bad luck* [he becomes] *a scribe,*

武官背時打草鞋。 [When] *military official meets bad luck* [he] *makes straw shoes.*<sup>499</sup>

The touch of pragmatism about devotion is very strong in this song. One could pray for advancement and even achieve it; however, a turn of fortune could easily take away all these achievements. Two things propelled the cult: a strong belief in the power of fortune together with personal ambition expressed in the cultural images of kingship and officialdom.<sup>500</sup>

We should ask why the cult of the Real Warrior became part of this poignant *haozi* tradition. As we can see from the songs, in Chongqing the ambition for social advancement as a civilian or military official was expressed in the form of prayer-like verses in the *haozi* directed toward one of the most popular gods of the Chinese pantheon: Zhen Wu. According to Gary Seaman, the Zhen Wu cult was firmly linked with Wudang shan 武當山 – a major Daoist monastery in today's Hubei province 湖北 - which from early Ming times enjoyed significant imperial patronage.<sup>501</sup> This led to the empire-wide construction of temples and dissemination of standardized scriptures.<sup>502</sup> The cult was, however, widespread on a much broader geographical and popular social scale, especially through spirit-writing associations. At this popular level, till the present day, Zhen Wu appears less as a god of warriors (its Ming-period meaning) and much more as heavenly protector of those in jeopardy. *Journey to the North*, one of the most complete popular accounts of the god's life and deeds, presents him as a vanquisher of demons that bring harm to humanity; suffering, death,

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<sup>499</sup> ZGYJC: 167.

<sup>500</sup> More on the subject of dreams for examination success see: Benjamin A. Elman. 2000. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 295-370.

<sup>501</sup> It reached particular prominence under the reigns of the first and third Ming emperors, Hong Wu 洪武 (1368-1398) and Yong Le 永樂 (1403-1425), as well as under Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1567) emperor. Seaman: 12-23.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid: 23-39.

torture, disease, famine and poverty. It also seems that this protective aspect of Zhen Wu was most popular in Chongqing and the surrounding area.<sup>503</sup>



Figure 13: Zhen Wu surrounded by his acolytes – defeated and then sworn in demons that fight with him against evil. Chongqing, 重慶市, Nan'an District 南岸區, Lao Jundong 老君洞, Xuanwu Palace 玄武殿. Photo: Igor Chabrowski.

The trail of the god's cult leads us to the meaning coded within the work songs. Hopes invested in achieving some social advancement were seen as laughable and people who harbored them appeared ridiculous. The boatmen had a very pragmatic and also gloomy vision of their social standing and, more generally, the opportunities open even to the better situated classes. In the vision drawn by Eastern Sichuan *haozi*, boatmen were imprisoned in their social status, but they were not alone in that. Other more privileged groups also could

<sup>503</sup> 1939 *Ba County Gazetteer* expressed an opinion that Zhen Wu Temple (Zhen Wu gong 真武宮) on Zhen Wu Mountain was the first defense line of Chongqing Prefecture, providing it with protection and auspicious influence. *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 418. My understanding and interpretation of Zhen Wu characteristics is entirely based on Seaman's translation of *Journey to the North*. For evidence on the scale of the cult in North China and other sources to its tradition see: Willem A. Grootaers. "The Hagiography of the Chinese God Chen-wu. (The Transmission of Rural Traditions in Chahar)," *Folklore Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1952): 139-181.

not expect to “jump the dragon gate,” even if they could demonstrate more education or ability. Zhen Wu thus was no longer a god of hope but rather a painful reminder of hopelessness.

Twisting the meaning of a popular local cult was not the only way boatmen expressed their dissatisfaction with the social order. One of the most ironic songs to be found among Eastern Sichuan *haozi* was called “Model Grand Guardian” (“Xun taibao” 訓太保).<sup>504</sup> It compares the toils of boatmen to the ten tasks of the Grand Guardian (*taibao*), an official with a function equivalent to regent in the European monarchic system.<sup>505</sup> *Taibao* was one of the highest offices available in the Chinese monarchic system, usually bestowed on the members of the imperial family.

坐沙舟整軍威一聲令號，     *The boat moored by the bank – military heroes sang in orderly fashion,*

尊一聲眾太保細聽根苗：     *The leading voice called, a crowd of regents responded one by one:*

恨龍王設險灘阻我航道，     *Hateful Dragon King blocks our way in a fortified rapid,*

一個個保安全志氣要高。     *One by one, securing each other, ambitions fly high.*

大太保拉縴藤去把路找，     *The eldest regent, pulling the rope scouts the way forward,*

二太保喊號子長聲吆，     *The second regent, screams haozi in the long sequence of yao yao,*

三太保去撿輓東奔西跳，     *The third regent searches the way running around busily,*

四太保站船頭手提叨篙，     *The fourth regent, sitting on the bow works with the punt pole,*

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<sup>504</sup> ZGYJC: 28.

<sup>505</sup> Further in the song I will refer to the Grand Guardian as ‘regent.’



五太保最會用鉤鉤爪爪,     *The fifth regent knows the best how to use the claws,*<sup>506</sup>

六太保大竿子手勁真高,     *The sixth regent can lift highest the big bamboo pole,*

七太保去燒火不離鍋灶,     *The seventh regent makes sure the fire does not die under the  
pot,*

八太保打雜工看艙刮潮,     *The eighth regent is the handyman ensuring the boat cuts the  
waves,*

九太保站船磴指揮航道,     *The ninth regent, from the stern directs where the boat goes,*

十太保在后艙手拿篾條,     *The tenth regent on the stern holds the rudder,*

眾太保一條心高聲吼號,     *All the regents in unison scream a loud song [haozi],*

有功勞又何愁沒有姣姣。     *Having so much merit and so many worries, they still lack  
beauty.*

The narrative of the song substitutes the elevated functions of the high official with the jobs performed by Yangzi boatmen. The irony in the song is inscribed not only in the meaning but also in the language. The substitution of a lowly and scornful boatman for a respectful Grand Guardian creates a satirical effect of the ‘world upside down,’ where the successful and important is in fact the one who is mean and shameful. The song reveals the self-critical and humorous face of *haozi* and of their singers, who took their low social standing lightly, without challenging their position. Yet, as with previously discussed traditions, there is a grimmer side to this song. It ridicules the lowly status of the boatman and underlines the impossibility of changing it.

Duan Ming and Hu Tiancheng in discussing this song (though under an alternative title “Tiao taibao” 調太保 – “Making fun of the Grand Guardian”) underline the humoristic and ironic nature of the language employed in the song. They claim that Grand Guardians, as

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<sup>506</sup> Claws used to ease an entrapped rope.

representatives of the imperial clan and high officials were associated with the lofty language of power. Employing similar language and names in discussing the work of boatmen was typically deemed ironic and ridiculous.

As in previously analyzed pieces, the means of expressing irony was derived from other oral art traditions, for the role of Grand Guardian and his ten tasks was a popular narrative motif. This motif, however, was not simply reproduced, but twisted and exploited by the work song singers. The meaning they arrived at served both to establish boatmen's social status and simultaneously ridicule its humbleness. In this context, the role of eminent figures needs a few words of explanation. Lords, kings and generals were heroes of popular culture, not because the common people harbored the desire to become rulers. As Peter Burke and Paul Cohen pointed out in their respective studies, the outstanding and elevated characters functioned as stereotypical types conveying meanings, ideas and models.<sup>507</sup> Among other issues of morality, these heroes were concerned with one's place within the society, wisdom about work and life, or the meaning of local customs and traditions, thus establishing the borders within which existence could be viewed. Thus *haozi* give us much less information about the dreams of poor workmen than about their conviction of the futility of any efforts to change one's social status. The boatmen who sang them clearly never dreamt of becoming officials, but they also understood that they were not going to experience social elevation in their lifetime. At the same time, and that is the topic of the next section, we will observe that boatmen did indeed try to assume an imagined better social status; yet their heroes were not officials but bandit-like personalities derived from heroic fiction and the vocabulary of secret societies.

## Group Ethos, Brotherhood and Heroism

The most common self-image of the boatman, after that of a pitiable work-exhausted wretch was that of a legendary hero, bound to his peers by a strong feeling of brotherhood. It was a collective picture, in which trackers and rowers appeared as a group and were strong through belonging to the group. It was the feeling of belonging and of working for the

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<sup>507</sup> A splendid example of such myth is the story of King Gou Jian 勾踐 (496-465 BCE) of Yue 越 (today's Zhejiang – Fujian provinces) and related proverb "sleep on the brush wood and taste the gall" (*woxin changdan* 臥薪嘗膽) analyzed by Paul A. Cohen. Paul A. Cohen, 2009. See also: Burke: 149-177.

common good that allowed boatmen to emerge from the slumbers of self-denigrating discourse into more laudatory images of the self. On the following pages we will attempt to analyze this image and its multiple meanings.

The value of united physical strength was an essential element of the reasoning behind this form of self-definition. Conversely, inability or unwillingness to cooperate and contribute was a sufficient reason to shame a person and ridicule him personally, as can be seen in the song “Rattan Rope is a Dragon” (緯藤是條龍, “Qianteng shi tiaolong”):

緯藤是條龍,	<i>Rattan rope is a dragon,</i>
內外尖子是英雄。	<i>There are heroes at both its ends.</i>
使力好哥子,	<i>Those who sweat together are brothers,</i>
不使力是條蟲。	<i>Those who don't are simply worms.</i> <sup>508</sup>

Trackers called themselves ‘heroes’ as their heroism was derived from teamwork and exerting physical strength. The ability to demonstrate one’s power in group labor shaped workers into brothers and was the factor that formed them into men. Those who were not willing to put their hands to work were nothing more than shameful worms.

The metaphors of this song require a bit of explanation: what did it mean that a rope was a dragon? What was the relationship between a dragon (*long* 龍) and a worm (*chong* 蟲)? Chongqing legends here prove helpful. One myth called “Flying Rope” (“Feilanzi” 飛纜子) tells the story of a demonic transformation of the rope used for mooring boats by one of Chongqing’s main gates called Qiansimen. The demon, which took a shape of a dragon, was born as a result of blood sacrifices conducted by boatmen thankful for safe arrival at the dock. The blood of killed chickens coagulated in the water and turned itself into a vicious creature thereafter wreaking havoc on the Jialing River and bringing ruin to boatmen and local people. Eventually, a Taoist arrived and fought the dragon, which when overpowered

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<sup>508</sup> Chuan: 895.

was transformed into a worm and later imprisoned in the priest's gourd.<sup>509</sup> The legend shows how in popular imagination intricate relations existed between the demonic forces, which could arise from unorthodox sacrifice and turn work tools into a fierce dragon, a creature that was associated both with benevolent power of water and with its destructive force in whirlpools, floods and storms.<sup>510</sup> Concurrently, the dragon when deprived of its supernatural power was in fact no more than a puny worm – the two creatures were antonymous and represented opposing images of capability and helplessness. In this context, the representation given in the *haozi*, of workers laboring together resembling a dragon, and those too lazy to join their muscles to the common cause as worms achieves fuller clarity.

The idea of brotherhood was not only laudable *per se*, but also served to set standards of behavior for the entire worker's group to follow. The song "When the boat makes it through, we can all rest" (船背活了才休息, "Chuan beihuole cai xiuxi")<sup>511</sup> explains how this form of group control was to be exercised. With the emphatic usage of the first person, the *haozi* singer indicates those he knows to be lazy and those he praises for hard work.

大家用力把步移,	<i>With our common force we move through,</i>
同心合力齊用力。	<i>Together we use common heart, common force,</i>
用力背船不偷懶,	<i>To pull the boat with muscle power one cannot be a loafer.</i>
臉上弄成桃紅色。	<i>Our faces become red like peaches.</i>
偷懶的人兒我曉得,	<i>The lazy ones – I know them all,</i>
看他汗水都沒得。	<i>I look to see if they are sweating and they are not at all.</i>
一步一步向前移,	<i>With each step we move forward,</i>

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<sup>509</sup> *Ba Yu*: 61-62.

<sup>510</sup> Williams: 132-141. Williams also mentioned one theory that a dragon could change his size at will, from a silkworm to an enormous creature.

<sup>511</sup> *Chuan*: 888-889.

船兒背活了才得休息。 *When the boat makes it through, then we can all rest.*

Cooperation was considered synonymous with brotherhood, with belonging to the group. In the song loafers (*toulan* 偷懶) appear as outsiders, people who do not belong to the group and who in fact harm the group. They are obstacles during work and thus are not worthy of participating in the group's activities – whether at work or in free time. Most of all, the loafers' attitude went against the boatmen's self-definition – that of a brother to his equally toiling peers.

The power of friendship and brotherhood was sealed not only during labor, but also through other forms of fraternization. Many songs gave equal weight to activities such as boat hauling or rowing and those in which the boatmen engaged when they reached various docks and wharfs (*matou*) across the province.<sup>512</sup> Drinking and sex obviously came to the fore, as is illustrated in the two *haozi* below.

“Boat reaches a dock and we drink wine” (船到碼頭把酒喝, *Chuan dao matou ba jiu he*)<sup>513</sup>

太陽出來照山坡, *The sun rises illuminating mountain slopes,*

大家用力往前拖。 *Everyone pushes forward with all their strength.*

同心協力向前走, *With one heart and united force we go forward,*

船到碼頭把酒喝。 *When the boat reaches the dock we will drink wine.*

A *haozi* “You can only support yourself when you have money” (腰桿活動才有錢用, “*Yaogan huodong cai you qian yong*”) connects the hard labor to various bawdy entertainments. As can be seen, it was the financial ability to enjoy sing-song girls that gave some pleasure and good company in life.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Those could either be parts of the cities, which typically for Eastern Sichuan were constructed along major waterways; or just make-shift temporary colonies set up during the sailing and tracking season (usually winter). See: Chapter 1.

<sup>513</sup> *Chuan*: 893-894.

<sup>514</sup> *Chuan*: 892.

頭橈號子二橈力，	<i>The front sings haozi, two rowers paddle strongly,</i>
三橈四橈要壘起。	<i>The third rower, fourth rower, together we have more force.</i>
尾兒弟兄雄威震，	<i>The brothers on the tail excel like heroes,</i>
擺脫流水就鬆楔。	<i>Shaking off the flowing water, we pierce like a wedge.</i>
山又高來路又窄，	<i>The mountains are high, and roads are narrow,</i>
鞋尖腳小走不得。	<i>On tips of the shoes [with] feet [so] small, and yet one cannot pass.</i>
背時幺妹莫性犟，	<i>Unlucky younger sister has never been stubborn,</i>
(足+歪) <sup>515</sup> 斷金蓮要流血。	<i>Twisting her golden lotus so that blood will drip.</i> <sup>516</sup>
時夾路，過河路，拐彎路，	<i>Squeezed on the road, crossing the river, [or] taking a turn,</i>
腰桿活動才有錢用。	<i>You can only support yourself when you have money.</i>

This rather complicated song needs some explanation. Apart from the notions already familiar to us, namely lauding the worth of coordinated labor and pointing to the difficulties of trackers' work, new elements appear. The mention of 'younger sister' (*yaomei*, 幺妹) and 'golden lotuses' (*jinlian*, 金蓮) all have sexual underpinnings. They talk of pleasures anticipated by the boatmen, who could relax after work and engage in such pastimes, squandering their hard-earned money. The final line brings in another notion, which was explained by the editors as follows: "boatmen needed to be young to be employed. When they aged, and their limbs were no longer nimble, so nobody wanted to hire them."<sup>517</sup> I would even expand this notion, as the inability to get hired (and earn wages) was

<sup>515</sup> *Wai* – Chongqing dialect for *niu* 扭: twist, turn around, seize. *Chuan*: 892.

<sup>516</sup> *Jinlian* 金蓮 – bound feet; a powerful sexual image in late-imperial culture, of definitive value when describing female beauty.

<sup>517</sup> *Chuan*: 892.

tantamount to being excluded from the benefits that derived from contact with other boatmen and social inclusion in the established social group. Thus, work, friendship, and pleasure were immediately out of reach.

In each of these songs we can see how the notion of brotherhood was understood. The boatmen saw themselves not as individuals, but as a collective. Their heroism was couched in terms of the whole team rather than as one person's achievement. Apart from some superficial similarities, the idea of collectivism was very different from the one later advocated by communist propaganda.<sup>518</sup> It was not about class struggle and a higher national aim of liberating laboring people from oppression, but about ensuring that the work team survived and performed its work successfully. We should view boatmen's sense of brotherhood within the framework of the family unit, which they tried to replicate in their communities.

Nevertheless, I hesitate to say that Sichuan river workers lacked any broader reflection on themselves as people sharing a similar lot. On the contrary, a number of songs show us that boatmen could look beyond the narrow interest of their own vessel and that mutual help on the river was perceived as necessary and laudable. At the same time, this notion was depoliticized and lacked any more general significance. As an example we may turn to a number of *haozi* that speak of the value of help received from other vessels when they got into difficulties. Here we will limit ourselves to an example that speaks about trackers who run into trouble on a narrow track but succeed due to help coming from another vessel. The song is called "Trackers wanted to cross this river" (船兒要過這條河, "Chuaner yaoguo zhetiao he."<sup>519</sup>

船兒要過這條河,                      *Trackers wanted to cross this river,*

山坡客伙莫夾抱脚。                      *On the slope no one could fit his feet.*

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<sup>518</sup> After 1949, there was produced a body of Sichuan *haozi* with direct political meaning, ex: "Thousand rivers flow to the sea, / ten thousand red flowers turn to the sun. / Boat-workers turn to Chairman Mao, / forever they stay with the Communist Party." (千條江河歸大海, / 萬朵紅花向太陽。 / 船工心向毛主席, / 永遠跟着共產黨。). *Chuan*: 909.

<sup>519</sup> *Chuan*: 888.

下河背船幫助我，                    *The down going boat aided me,*

大家過得很笑和。                    *[And] we all later laughed a lot.*

The song shows that the notion of fraternity was true not only for each individual vessel, but for a whole river traffic. This song shows that when tracking appeared impossible because of a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, other boats rushed to help without seeking any reward. The impressions produced show idealized working conditions uncorrupted by egoism or a desire for profit. Moreover, it reveals that in these conditions direct competition between vessels ran counter to the boatmen's primary goals and needs – the rivers of Sichuan were highly dangerous and a precarious work environment required special care and cooperation from all boating parties. Self-interest would disrupt the system and cause harm to all involved.<sup>520</sup>

Some traditions, however, went beyond mere association between boatmen and collective heroism. By employing vocabulary borrowed from oral narratives and secret society argot, boatmen tried to depict themselves as a type of idealized knight-errant or hero-bandit. We can find such audacious statements of the power of brotherhood in the *haozi* entitled "We can twist a dragon by its horns" (要把龍角來扳彎 "Yao ba longjiao lai banwan"). Compared to the previous song we can see even stronger emphasis placed on mutual relationships and the united power of men's muscles working together.

眾家兄弟雄威顯，                    *Brothers older and younger, we are all illustrious heroes.*

拉過流水心才歡。                    *Pulling against the current, our hearts rejoice.*

龍虎灘，不算灘，                    *Dragon and Tiger Rapid, innumerable rapids,*

我們力量大如天。                    *Our power is as big as Heavens.*

要將猛虎牙撥掉，                    *We can pull teeth from the ferocious tiger's jaw,*

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<sup>520</sup> It seems that this form of egoism exercised by steamer captains was a cause of much more frequent accidents and of much lamentation on the part of the native boatmen. See: Woodhead: 37-38.



要把龍角來扳彎。 *We can twist a dragon by its horns.*<sup>521</sup>

Here, a river worker was portrayed through the usage of common literary tropes comparing trackers' and rowers' teams to popular heroes, such the tiger fighter Wu Song 武松 from the *Water Margin* tradition (*Shuihuzhuan* 水滸傳).<sup>522</sup> The meaning, although shaped by the literary reference, is quite similar to previous traditions – boatmen working together were like heroes; their brotherhood and cooperation gave them the power to overcome the most overwhelming difficulties.

This idea is even more developed in a Yangzi work song "Roaming Rivers and Lakes" (走江湖 "Zuo jianghu"), which states that a boatman would rather chose to do his work than live the existence of a normal bread eater.<sup>523</sup>

爹娘生兒一尺五,                      *My parents raised me one foot five inches tall,*

還沒長大就送我去讀書。 *I wasn't yet grown up but was sent to school.*

讀書又怕挨屁股,                      *Studying books I was afraid my buttocks would suffer too much,*

收拾一個包包走江湖。 *[So] with a pole and sack I ran to where rivers and lakes are.*

說走江湖來就走江湖,                      *Talking of rivers and lakes, I have roamed rivers and lakes,*

哪一州一縣你看我不熟。 *There is no prefecture, there is no county that I don't know.*

[...]

The song then continued to list important or remarkable ports, monuments, docks, or landing places in Sichuan, as its various versions cover either the entire province or only its eastern section (focused on Chongqing).<sup>524</sup> According to this *haozi*, one embarked on this

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<sup>521</sup> *Chuan*: 891.

<sup>522</sup> This tradition should not only be associated with the novel. It existed in various renditions and forms in the popular storytelling across China. Børdahl, 2010: 83-156, esp. Appendix A, *ibid*: 131-135.

<sup>523</sup> *Chuan*: 855-856.

<sup>524</sup> More than twenty nine such traditions were collected; see: *Chuan*: 846-883.

trade and lifestyle in order to run away from family and find opportunities for social advancement. The child's fear of beating (which constituted an indispensable part of traditional education) was a sufficient excuse to escape and take up any work that required unskilled hands. Working as a tracker or rower – a person who travelled the rivers of Sichuan province, one could see the world outside the parochial confines of the village or town ward.<sup>525</sup>

“Roaming rivers and lakes” or fighting the tiger were concepts firmly engraved in Chinese popular culture and drew on the heroic imagery springing from the early Ming narrative of *Shuihuzhuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*). *Shuihuzhuan* was one of the most popular traditions of late imperial China, describing the lives of stylized bandits and rebels who secluded themselves in Liangshan Mountain 梁山 in today's Shandong Province 山東省 in order to fight the evil encapsulated in the degenerate Northern Song emperor Huizong 徽宗. Their main weapon against oppression, apart from military prowess, was an unshakable devotion to the virtue of loyalty both to their leader, Song Jiang 宋江, and to the righteousness of imperial rule. More importantly for us here is the fact that the ideals of loyalty and heroism, expressed through such characters as Song Jiang and Wu Song respectively, had a profound impact on the imagination of Chinese society.<sup>526</sup>

It is obviously inconceivable that the river-workers' argot sprang directly from the novel's literary text; it is however fairly certain that a broad variety of texts were transmitted through oral performances and their vocabulary and images disseminated in everyday language. Scholars have pointed to the role of temple festivals and sing-song girls in

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<sup>525</sup> This and similar songs are presented in the Chapter 4, showing the geographical scope of boatmen and their understanding of the river-world.

<sup>526</sup> Other heroes from popular narratives also influenced interpretations of facts and actions of people acquainted with traditional popular culture. Wen-hsin Yeh. “Dai Li and the Liu Geqing Affair: Heroism in the Chinese Secret Service During the War of Resistance,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Aug., 1989): 556-558. Song Jiang was the leader of rebels epitomizing loyalty and righteousness in all his dealings; Wu Song was a strongman and ruffian whose carelessness connected with an unshakable sense of justice and limitless courage often landed him in trouble. Stories of Wu Song were among the most popular among audiences. Børdahl, 2003: 65-112.

transmitting a whole variety of traditions, especially the very popular ones associated with the *Water Margin*.<sup>527</sup>

Storytellers and prostitutes were not the only people who exercised an influence on the boatmen's worldview. Their vocabulary and beliefs were also fortified by the ideology of Sichuan's most prominent secret society – the Gowned Brothers (Gelaohui). Gelaohui, as we have seen in previous chapters, maintained lodges in docklands and teahouses in provinces. It gathered local strongmen who through the clandestine organization managed to control much of the trade and employment. At the same time, Gelaohui influenced local working class culture, above all through endorsement of the image of “rivers and lakes.” Wang Di stated that this concept was formalized during the nineteenth century, when the scholar Zhuo Tingzi 卓亭子 edited a dictionary called *The Language of Itinerary Peoples of Rivers and Lakes* (*Jianghu qieyao* 江湖切要). Zhuo associated this concept with the argot of secret societies and itinerant professional groups and the work they performed.<sup>528</sup> “Rivers and lakes” meant reproducing cultural models from the secret society's own history as well as from classics of popular literature to express an ideology of struggle against foreign imperial oppression (the Qing).<sup>529</sup> It also represented a particular ‘heroic’ posture taken by Gelaohui members in the way they acted in public space.<sup>530</sup>

Gelaohui also endorsed the idea of a fictive brotherhood, which sprang from myth-based anti-Manchu rhetoric. Brothers (Gelaohui members) called themselves *Hanliu* 漢畱 which meant both “Han survivors” of Manchu invasion and ideological descendants of Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223), the righteous ruler of the kingdom of Shu (modern Sichuan).<sup>531</sup> The reference to Liu Bei was especially important as it gave meaning and form to non-kin brotherhoods: “[the] story of Liu Bei swearing an oath of brotherhood in the Peach Garden with Guan Yu

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<sup>527</sup> See: Børdahl, 1999, Børdahl, 2010. John Fitzgerald. “Continuity Within Discontinuity: The Case of Water Margin Mythology,” *Modern China* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jul., 1986): 370-375. Shen Congwen pointed out that Hunan boatmen learned about a variety of popular songs and stories from sing-song girls and local religious festivals: Shen Congwen, *Xiangxing sanji*: 21-30.

<sup>528</sup> Wang Di, 2008: 81. Wang consulted a second edition of these works *Xinke jianghu qieyao* 新刻江湖切要 published in 1884.

<sup>529</sup> For general information on Gelaohui ideology and history see: Chapter 1.

<sup>530</sup> McIsaac, 2000: 1644-1649.

<sup>531</sup> Liu 畱 meaning “survivor” and Liu 劉, the surname are homonyms, sharing the same 2<sup>nd</sup> tone (*ersheng* 二聲). Wang Di, 2008: 84.

and Zhang Fei known as the “Three Sworn Brothers of the Peach Garden” (*Taoyuan sanjieyi* [桃園三結義]) had a great impact on the Gowned Brotherhood. Li Bei is significant both for his local roots and for the legendary Peach Garden Oath, which served as a model for the Gowned Brotherhood, and indeed for male sodalities in general.”<sup>532</sup> The Gelaohui set the standard for the understanding and implementation of the notion of brotherhood in the male underworld of Sichuan.

There is no sufficient source base to claim that Sichuan boatmen broadly shared the political agenda of the Gelaohui. However, it is quite apparent that the argot of the secret society was involved in a constant exchange, a trade in words, between secret society members and the worker communities.<sup>533</sup> In fact, as Wang proved, the special language of Gelaohui was ingrained with words relating both to river labor and to the heroic deeds of legendary heroes. More often than not these words concealed different meanings from those voiced, functioning like a code understandable only to those acquainted with it.<sup>534</sup> We can state therefore that Gelaohui while intermingling with, infiltrating and organizing Sichuan river workers also managed to infiltrate its cultural imagery inside the mentality and system of representations derived from other narrative sources. Immense congruity in the choice of images and literary referents betray a deep relationship and intermingling (though I would refrain from seeing causality) between both groups. Since the Gowned Brothers as a society and ideology matured in nineteenth century Sichuan within the social environment of river workers, their imagery and values can to a great extent be seen as representative of the group that provided its social base. The convergence of moral codes held by Gelaohui members and boat workers was remarkable and by no means coincidental.<sup>535</sup>

It is apparent from the above-mentioned traditions that the self-perceptions of trackers were largely reproductions of broader literary and secret-society themes built upon the

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid: op. cit.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid: 2008: 167-199. Itinerant populations and rural migrants, during Republican times were often barely distinguished from bandits and robbers (*daoifei* 盜匪); very often, especially during the periods of rebellion and social disruption such labeling was not far from the truth: Chi Zihua: 192-227.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid: 88-90.

<sup>535</sup> Similar cases of intermingling and cultural interchange between secret societies, sectarian groups or organized bandit groups and the boatmen were pointed out by Robert J. Antony for the late eighteenth early nineteenth century Fujian coast, Antony: 139-163; David E. Kelly analyzed such a process among eighteenth century Grand Canal boatmen: David E. Kelly. “Temples and Tribute Fleets: The Luo Sect and Boatmen’s Associations in the Eighteenth Century,” *Modern China*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (July, 1982): 361-391.

widespread hero-rebel narrative. In some *haozi* a 'hero', whether a tracker, boatman or oarsman was a free spirit who broke away from the prevailing social structure with the purpose of seeing the world, seeking good company and demonstrating his physical prowess. In the majority of others the 'hero' was a collective construction, describing a well coordinated work team. Boatmen styled themselves in this way in order to appreciate their greatest achievement – surviving and succeeding in excruciating work through common effort. Just as the heroes of traditions such as the *Water Margin*, this feat was possible only by forsaking egoistic goals.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the image of deprivation was central to the self-representation of the Sichuan river workers. It not only resulted from the realization of economic exploitation on the part of the employers, but also from the consciousness of low social standing among social groups. To an even greater extent, the pain came from being deprived of even elementary dignity, conceptualized as providing care for one's family, having a full stomach or not suffering abuse. Boatmen expressed a fundamental disjunction between expected and experienced realities and manifested their comprehension of blatant injustice in the form of sarcastic songs. They subverted such images as that of the benevolent god Zhen Wu or that of high officials in order to express their disappointment with the social order and their disreputable position within it. However, in the same context, we should understand the efforts to adopt a heroic stance and the notion of brotherhood within boatmen's reality. Through such images boatmen dignified their social standing and gave themselves a sense of purpose, providing ready-made explanations and excuses for failures in social advancement and fulfillment. As with the *Water Margin* heroes, the reaction to social oppression was expressed as a call for adventure, exploration, the experience of "roaming lakes and rivers" and being outside a society whose norms were bound by hierarchy and obligation. In the songs, the boatmen became people of the road, those that 'saw-it-all' and acquired knowledge that shaped them and changed them. These experiences came at the price of poverty and physical exhaustion, daily deprivations, suffering from constant travel and most of all, exploitation by their bosses and superiors. At the same time, the misery of river life enforced the comparison between them and the mythical heroes even more strongly. Thus,

the boatmen on the one hand suffered indignity and poverty, while on the other hand they enjoyed the company of peers, a common purpose and a sense of righteousness that gave profound meaning to their drifting existence.

This ascription of cultural symbolism can be seen from two angles. On the one hand, it ennobled the river workers whose low social and cultural standing placed them among the most destitute classes of China. Referring to mythical heroes gave such workers a sense of exceptionality in the face of a society which otherwise did not provide cultural space for itinerant groups, perceived most commonly as a threat to public order. On the other hand, usage of discourses of poverty, collective heroism and brotherhood gave them weapons of resistance to their oppression. By elaborating their miserable lives and at the same time unique positive qualities they gave voice to their dissatisfaction with their current status and lack of opportunities. Bemoaning their misery, ridiculing social order and associating themselves with literary hero-bandits strengthened their group sense of belonging and enabled them to attack, in however veiled a manner, their oppressors.

Finally, we need to mention that in contrast to Shanghai workers, these representations were neither related to processes of national and class struggle, nor were they the only methods of self-portrayal undertaken by the workers. Before the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), river workers' sentiments seem to have escaped ideological reinterpretation, whether of the nationalist or the communist strain. As there is no easy explanation for this divergence, it seems that the relative provinciality of the Chongqing region, the geographic dispersion and migratory character of the work, as well as the persistent influx of landless peasants into the working classes of Sichuan, not to mention illiteracy, contributed to the largely traditional vocabulary of the *haozi* tradition.

# CHAPTER 6 – FEAR OF BEING EATEN.

## DEATH AS PICTURE OF BOATMEN’S SOCIAL POSITION

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Death, even though it is a person’s most private experience, has always had an enormous social meaning. In this chapter, I will explore how the perception of death, and ways of dying and their meaning differed between Sichuan urban and rural dwellers and the boatmen. It is my claim that the depiction of death produced by Sichuan boatmen expressed most acutely their perception of pariah social status.

For the boatmen the subject of death turned into an obsession, an omnipresent topic of thought, a referent for their self-perception and a representation of their place within the society. Dying permeated the songs and shaped the narratives about their places of work and residence. The manner in which it occupied their minds was highly interesting and, it seems, original, considering the social and economic conditions in which it arose. A boatman’s death was implicitly brutal, yet that did not preoccupy them as much as what happened afterward. Repeating the phrase “to be devoured by fish and shrimp” (死了去喂魚蝦, “sile quwei yuxia”), they expressed a fear that related to fundamental aspects of their existence as human beings. What was the difference between their death and that of other lower class groups. Why they dreaded having their corpses eaten will be the main question of this chapter. What gave rise to these fears, how they were expressed and what their significance was within social and cultural conditions of this province will be the other central issues analyzed in the following pages.

### Death in Chinese Culture

Death and funerary rituals (*xiongli* 凶禮) were seen as a central and, as many scholars have claimed, the most important social experience within Chinese culture. In this vein, James Watson posited that death was a definitive process that constructed and differentiated

Chinese people from their neighbors and other nations.<sup>536</sup> Certainly, by late-imperial times there was significant uniformity in the experience and representation of death across all the lands of the empire. Nevertheless, scholars have rejected the view that Chinese people experienced and understood loss of life and issues of ancestry in any integrated manner. Differences not only existed in the ritual form of the funerals, but in the very conceptualization of them; rituals for the deceased, as other rituals, were a field of political contestation and struggle both between different segments of society and between various ritual specialists.<sup>537</sup> Moreover, they varied regionally depending on the contingencies and actors involved.<sup>538</sup>

Death in China, from the earliest antiquity, has been wrapped in elaborate rituals, which evolved with time, absorbing and creating various local particularities. Jordan Paper defined its significance in the following words:

Death in the Chinese society means becoming an ancestor. As the ancestral cult is central in this society, so the rites connected with death and its aftermath are the most protracted and serious of all Chinese religious practices. The rituals were written into elaborately detailed codes before the beginning of the Christian era, and those codes have been in force down to the twentieth century. While there are variants on the rituals at different times and places, and in accordance with the social

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<sup>536</sup> "[to] be Chinese in this context [question of *wen* 文: civilization vs. no-civilization] meant that one played by the rules of the dominant culture and was judged to be a good performer by those who took it upon themselves to make such judgments – neighbors, local leaders, or imperial officials." Further he stated: "[from] the perspective of ordinary people, to be Chinese was to understand and accept the view that there was a correct way to perform key rituals associated with the life cycle, namely, the rites of birth, marriage, death, and ancestorhood. Correct performance of these rites was one clear and unambiguous method of distinguishing the civilized from the uncivilized or, when considering marginal peoples, the cooked from the uncooked. Put another way, practice rather than belief was what made one Chinese." James L. Watson, 1993. "Rites or beliefs? The Construction of a Unified Culture in Late Imperial China" in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim eds. *China's Quest for National Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 86-87. James L. Watson. "Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society: Pollution, Performance and Social Hierarchy" in Evelyn S. Rawski, James L. Watson, eds. 1988. *Death Ritual in Late-Imperial and Modern China*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press: 109-134.

<sup>537</sup> Paul R. Katz. "Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy beyond State: Standardizing Ritual in Chinese Society," *Modern China*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2007): 78-81.

<sup>538</sup> Melissa J. Brown. "Ethnic Identity, Cultural Variation, and Process of Change: Rethinking the Insights of Standardization and Orthopraxy," *Modern China*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2007): 91-124.



and economic status of the family, in essentials they conform to the prescriptions in the sacred Li texts [ritual prescriptions].<sup>539</sup>

By late imperial times and into the twentieth century the diversity of practices did not necessarily lead to conflicts as the main traditions coalesced into the officially sanctioned Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教), consisting of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer pointed out that these three institutionalized traditions followed “common frameworks” but gave “varying interpretations” as to the meaning of life and death.<sup>540</sup> They also pointed out that: “[...] the Three Teachings did not function as self-contained institutions that provided lay followers with an exclusive path to salvation, as in the nineteenth-century Western concept of religion; rather, their function was to transmit their tradition of practice and to serve the entire society, either through the teaching of individual spiritual techniques or through the provision of liturgical services to associations and communities.” In this context Goossaert and Palmer pointed to the late-imperial division of ritual functions between each of the traditions, where: “[...] Confucians [were] monopolizing statecraft and playing a privileged role in kin-based worship; Taoist liturgy often structuring communal festivals; and Buddhist priests often [were] being the preferred choice for conducting funerals.”<sup>541</sup>

Two important elements have to be added to this general picture. Firstly, as Donald Sutton pointed out, the content of ritual prescriptions and their application was more problematic. The Confucian canon of appropriate funerary functions, which was presented by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), with its twenty two steps, barely corresponded to the actions of actual mourners.<sup>542</sup> Only the richest families could afford to fully perform the ritual and that mostly

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<sup>539</sup> Paper: 45.

<sup>540</sup> Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer. 2011. *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: 22.

<sup>541</sup> The authors also claimed that only the clerics and a few lay devotees, so called *jushi* 居士, believed in one of the traditions only. Very few lay people did so. Goossaert and Palmer: 22. Timothy Brook explained the differences between Buddhist and Neo-Confucian funerary rituals and their influence on lineage construction in late-imperial China: Timothy Brook. “Funerary Ritual and The Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Dec., 1989): 465-499.

<sup>542</sup> Donald S. Sutton. “Death Rites and Chinese Culture: Standardization and Variation in Ming and Qing Times,” *Modern China*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2007):128-133. Nicholas Standaert defined Zhu Xi contribution as follows: “The most important Chinese prescriptive text concerning funerals in the Ming dynasty was *Family Rituals* (*Jiali*), compiled by the Song scholar Zhu Xi. It is a manual for the private performance of the standard Chinese family rituals – capping, wedding, funeral, and ancestral sacrifice – with one chapter devoted to each rite. Judging by

took place in order to demonstrate and strengthen their social position.<sup>543</sup> Sutton underlined multiple other factors defining the final performance of the rituals:

Status making, or the manufacture of social difference, was a crucial aspect of funerals and must have limited the homogenizing of local ritual practice. To focus on ritual as a way of differentiation, no less than as the instrument of standardization, is to reveal its dynamic and creative role as well as its society-sustaining, culture-reproducing side.<sup>544</sup>

Secondly, there existed a substantial variety at the level of Chinese popular religion, which already from Song times (10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) mingled various traditions adopting and altering their meanings, whether of orthodox, sectarian, local or tribal provenance.<sup>545</sup> We are not here going to discuss in any detail any of these divisions and related debates. Instead, following Sutton's idea, we are going to look at the differences both in practice and imagined meaning produced by the lower classes of Eastern Sichuan. Against this background we are going to highlight boatmen's traditions and try to understand their vision and meaning of death in comparison with that held by other lower class groups in the province.

### **Burial and Soul: Overview of the Beliefs**

An orthodox late-imperial vision of Chinese society stipulated that proper performance of funerary rituals functioned as an embodiment of the most highly regarded Confucian value of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) – maintaining and expressing the appropriate relations and feelings that bound society: i.e. between ruler and ruled, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, and between friends. Conversely, lack of filial piety pronounced through incorrect or halfhearted ritual performance was seen as a source of chaos (*luan* 亂)

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chapter length, funerals are by far the most important of the rites of passage in China. Funerals were indeed the quintessential expressions of 'filial piety' or 'reverence toward parents' (*xiao*), a value that by late imperial times was embedded in the core of the orthodoxy and orthopraxy accepted by most Chinese. Through funerary rites, filial sons could fulfil their duty to repay the kindness they had received from their parents, a duty that did not end with death." Nicolas Standaert. 2008. *The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals in the Cultural Exchange between China and Europe*. Seattle & London: A China Program Book, University of Washington Press: 11.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid: 142-145.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid: 145.

<sup>545</sup> For discussions and disagreements on the appropriate terms of Chinese religion and Chinese popular religion, see: Vincent Goossaert. 2007. *The Taoist of Peking, 1800-1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center: 1-11. Von Glahn, 2004: 1-13. Kwang-Ching Liu. "Introduction: Orthodoxy in Chinese Society" in *Orthodoxy in Late-Imperial China*: 1-24. R. David Arkush. "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century Chinese Proverbs" in *Orthodoxy in Late-Imperial China*: 311-335.

leading to a disastrous outcome, break-up of the family, of the community and eventually of the state.<sup>546</sup> This orthodox socially-oriented vision of death, funerals and ancestry would hold no meaning if not for the firm belief in the human soul (or souls) held and transmitted by each of the religious traditions in China.

The concept of soul in Chinese culture has caused a number of disagreements, which will necessarily be omitted here. What I want to focus on are the factors relevant to our understanding of the popular traditions presented. Scholars such as Stevan Harrell have wrestled with popular perceptions of the existence of soul and a number of souls endorsed in Chinese popular religion. Harrell on the basis of interviews suggested that there was in fact only one soul, which had different functions and places in popular thinking, each calling for different actions according to which one of them a person was addressing.<sup>547</sup> The soul (*ling-hun* 靈魂), as he claimed:

[...] is this element which makes a person a real person. The *ling-hun* does not exactly give life to the body: the body can exist, at least temporarily, without *ling-hun*. What a body without a *ling-hun* is missing is not life but humanity, defined in terms of the culturally accepted and assumed forms of appropriate behavior in a Chinese context. A person without a *ling-hun* – a newborn babe, a sickly child, a psychotic adult, a shaman or medium in trance – is not behaving the way an ordinary Chinese ought to behave. Most instances in which a Chinese behaves abnormally are attributed to a missing *ling-hun*. In this sense the *ling-hun* is the cultural aspect of a person, that part which makes for understandable behavior.<sup>548</sup>

Further on, Harrell claimed that the belief in personality, which is contained within the soul, caused Chinese people to care for their deceased in a rather personalized manner, for as long as they had memory of their habits and preferences during their lifetime.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Watson, 1993: 100-101.

<sup>547</sup> This point was challenged by Myron L. Cohen who on the basis of his research emphasized the existence of three souls. In that he undermined the further conclusions of Harrell. Cohen, Myron L. "Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion" in: Watson and Rawski: 182-183.

<sup>548</sup> Stevan Harrell. "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (May, 1979): 527.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid: 528.

The belief in the soul, which was in fact the real essence of humanity and thus the authentic personality both socially and individually of one's ancestor, stood as the corner-stone of the belief, importance, and validity of the Chinese ancestor cult. Expressions of filial piety came not only in the funerary rituals just after a person's death, but also through regular yearly ceremonies and even constant daily reference to one's ancestor.<sup>550</sup> In contrast, neglect of this cult was grave with consequences for the dead, for their careless family, and often for the community. As there was no uniform vision of salvation, apart from in sectarian cults or minority Muslim and Christian communities, the dead existed in constant communication and mutual dependence with the living.<sup>551</sup> In 'normal' conditions, when a family was filial and cared for appropriate ritual practice, it was imagined that the soul would travel to purgatory in which punishments would be inflicted on it for the misdeeds committed during lifetime. Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon and Gregory Blue underline that such a vision of the afterlife, though coming from Buddhist tradition was broadly shared in Chinese popular religious imagination irrespective of one's particular convictions and persuasions. They stated that

Postmortem suffering was not designed to achieve perfection prior to eternal communion with God. It was not a place to which sinners went to "purge" their sins once and for all. The underground prison was instead the place to which everyone went immediately after death: the good were quickly excused once their cases had been examined, while those who had moral accounts to settle from their previous life received the punishments that paid off those debts before going on to the next.<sup>552</sup>

A person happily in possession of a filial family and who himself had not accumulated a long list of demerits could expect quite painless rebirth into the world of the living. Depending on the denominations (whether Buddhist or Daoist) possible ways of rebirth, afterlife destiny, and their meanings differed, but this question will not be developed here further. What we are interested in here is the imagined life after death for those who were not in such a

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<sup>550</sup> Prescription for the appropriate construction of the house and communication with the ancestors enshrined in the tablets, see translation of Zhu Xi, *Jiali* (Family Rituals): Paper: 30-40.

<sup>551</sup> Myron L. Cohen: 180-183.

<sup>552</sup> Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon, and Gregory Blue. 2008. *Death by a Thousand Cuts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 122.

privileged position, namely those whose unfilial family broke ritual communication with the spirit world, or who had no descendants to care for them.

Whatever small particularities existed within ritual practice, it is important for us to underline the most crucial elements. Death, for the Chinese people, was perhaps the most important of the rites and demanded special attention and minute ritual practice. Deceased members of the family were becoming ancestors and their fortune was intricately bound up with that of its living members. Not much attention should be given to the argument that death rites defined Chinese culture, though they were fundamental for social and religious life. Orthopraxy, expressed in minute performance of rites prescribed and largely standardized by Zhu Xi was a statement of the political, social and economic position of a family vis-à-vis both the other members of society (other classes or competing families) and imperial power. In this context, we should look at the way death was perceived, imagined and understood by the workers of Eastern Sichuan.

## Death in Eastern Sichuan

### Overview

A body of evidence gathered in the 1939 *Ba County Gazetteer* and by a notable scholar-missionary David Crockett Graham for the period between 1911 and 1948 point in a similar direction to that highlighted by Sutton. The chapter in the *Gazetteer* devoted to funerals (*xiongli* 凶禮), although sustaining the point that the people of Chongqing performed the ritual according to the prescriptions of Zhu Xi listed only seven of its elements. They were as follows: announcement (赴告, *fugao*); inscribing a banner (銘旌, *mingjing*); spirit silks (魂帛, *hunbo*); selecting a person to inscribe the spirit tablet (題主, *tizhu*); burning paper money (楮幣, *chubi*); returning spirit (回煞, *huisha*); and exorcisms, prayers and feeding of spirits which are in hell lasting from the seventh day till the hundredth day after death (七七百日, *qiqi bairi*).<sup>553</sup> This is not to indicate that local rituals were in some way heterodox, but rather that funerary practices could be much simpler since they had to suit the financial and social capabilities of the families of the deceased.

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<sup>553</sup> *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 726-738

We find confirmation of the existence of such practices in writings of Graham who attended the funeral of a member of a rich family from Yibin (south-eastern Sichuan) on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1928. Although without any claim to generalization, Graham underlined the basic concordance between the practices in Sichuan and other parts of China. Nonetheless, he pointed out that irrespective of social class (and the funeral he observed belonged to that of an affluent family), Sichuan people were particularly afraid of demons that could disrupt a ceremony. Graham claimed that to alleviate the problem celebrants mounted roosters on the coffins, which could supposedly scare off the demons.<sup>554</sup>

### Death in Eastern Sichuan Folksongs

A much less demonic vision of death was expressed in the funerary songs (*sangzang ge* 喪葬歌) gathered in Eastern Sichuan. The funerary songs from Tongliang County (Tongliang xian 銅梁縣, West of Hechuan), Jiulongpo district (Jiulongpo qu 九龍坡區, currently within Chongqing city borders), and Jiangbei (also part of Chongqing city) all attest to a very emotional and personal view of death. It needs to be noted that all of these folk traditions also represent a rather orthodox vision of death and are free from any indication of the demonic fears mentioned by Graham. We can speculate on two reasons for that: firstly, a taboo on naming and speaking of demons; secondly, the great reluctance of editors to publish material about ‘superstitious’ practices.<sup>555</sup>

Interestingly, the funerary songs from Eastern Sichuan mostly expressed grief due to the death of a wife and mother. Their assumed singers were males, husbands and fathers of the orphaned children. The reason for death was one of the most common in a society with no access to modern medicine – childbirth or soon after childbirth.<sup>556</sup> These were all premature deaths and their impact was destructive for the family (as a socio-economic unit), but also as

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<sup>554</sup> Graham: 38-45.

<sup>555</sup> See: Chapter 2.

<sup>556</sup> See: Tina Philips Johnson. 2011. *Childbirth in Republican China: Delivering Modernity*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. Gail Hershatter. “Birthing Stories: Rural Midwives in 1950s China” in Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz. 2007. *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 337-358.

many songs attest, from the emotional aspect. A song "Soothing mother's convalescence" ("Quan niang yangbing" 勸娘養病):<sup>557</sup>

女兒床前哭一聲， *The daughter cries aloud by the bed,*

我請我娘聽原因。 *I enjoin my wife to listen to reason.*

羅裙絲線清梗梗， *The thin silk threads of the dress [are] in a clear order,*

不知我娘病深沉。 *I did not know my wife's disease to be so grave.*

頭也痛來眼也暈， *Her head started aching, her eyes confused,*

恍恍惚惚少精神。 *Her spirit became faint.*

女兒看娘加了病， *The daughter observes how [her] mother gets sicker,*

才為我娘求神靈。 *Then, we asked the gods to help my wife.*

觀音廟前悔朝愿， *Facing Guan Yin temple we repent and direct to her our wishes,*

娘娘廟前把香焚。 *In front of the goddess's temple we burn incense.*

靈官有悔戲一本， *The temple officials had a play of repentance,*

土地有悔紅一根。 *The locality god had a red incense stick for repentance.*

又接仙娘把仙問， *We reached out to the immortal goddess with questions,*

又拜北斗又念經。 *We also honored Northern Dipper and recited scriptures.*

樣樣主意都打定， *In every teaching we put our hope,*

不見我娘好一分。 *But my wife did not get better even a bit.*

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<sup>557</sup> ZGYJC: 371-372.

勸娘好些將息病， *Soothing my wife could make her a little better,*

神藥兩改自然輕。 *The spiritual medicine turned her naturally light. [lifted her soul away?]*

In the context of the song's purpose (funerary), the final line, though quite obscure, indicates the failure of all the solutions entertained by the desperate husband and his daughter. *Shenyao* 神藥, which can be translated as "spiritual medicine", if we are to believe the cases built upon research of the Chinese Zhuang 壯 and Tibetan (Zang 藏) minorities, indicates a shamanistic practice of taking medicines and communicating with spirits, leading to purging of the evil demon from the sick person's body.<sup>558</sup>

The song shows two important elements in experiencing death: the suffering of the family and the inability to combat impending death. The birth-related disease that attacks a wife and mother cannot be treated in any way with the means at hand, in this case with prayer and spiritual practices. The normally merciful gods, such as Guan Yin, and powerful spirits invoked through shamanistic rituals (*shenyao*) fail the ailing woman and only death brings her respite. This song expresses despair and pain experienced in the intimate circle of the close family. At the same time, it does not engage with the problems of the afterlife, or with ritual practice surrounding death.

A very similar tradition, both in terms of content and expressed feelings, was found in Jiulongpo – historically a rural community on the banks of the Yangzi in the close vicinity of Chongqing (now part of the city). Called "My wife day and night is busy with our son" ("Wo niang wei er zhouye mang" 我娘為兒晝夜忙), it first tells a story of parental love and worries.<sup>559</sup>

人生在世為哪樣? *How are people's lives?*

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<sup>558</sup> Liu Zhiyang 劉志揚. "'Shenyao liang jie': Baima Zangzu minsu yiliao guannian yu shijian" "'神藥兩解': 白馬藏族民俗醫療觀念與實踐." *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao (renwen sheke ban)* 西南民族大學學報 (人文社科版) 2008/10, overall No. 206: 14-21. Li Jing 李婧. "Zhuangzu 'shenyao liang jie' guannianxia zhiliao shijian '壯族'神藥兩解'觀念下治療實踐." *Nanjing yike daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 南京醫科大學學報 (社會科學版), Feb. 2012, No. 1, overall No. 48: 18-21.

<sup>559</sup> ZGYJC: 373-374.



為兒為女晝夜忙。 *Day and night busy with sons and daughters.*

為兒積錢買田地, *Saving money to buy land for the son,*

為女出閣辦嫁妝。 *Gathering the daughter's dowry.*

[...]

Then the song tells a story familiar from the previous tradition: post-natal disease, a mother's suffering and her fear of failing in parental duties. What follows is a description of the father's frantic search for a cure for his wife.

[...]

聽說那裡先生好, *I've heard that there I can find a good doctor,*

半夜就醫熬藥湯。 *Half the night, [he] boiled a medicinal soup.*

聽說兒女關煞重, *I've heard [my] son and daughter to stop death's approach,*

拜街拜橋拜保娘。 *Prayed on the streets, prayed on bridges, prayed to the protecting goddess.*

一生受盡萬般苦, *In a lifetime one receives limitless pain,*

從不怨夫怨兒郎。 *[Better] never complain, father [;] [better] never complain, son.*

富貴帶兒容易過, *Riches come and quickly go,*

貧窮帶兒實難當。 *Poverty is so hard to endure.*

而今我娘歸天去, *And today my wife went back to heaven,*

怎不叫兒心慘傷。 *How can I not call myself sorrowful.*

This song expressed not only distrust in religion as solution to disease, but also in doctors and medicine. None of these techniques was able to stop the progress of this perhaps most common and deadly illness that struck women across China. Interestingly, the song, instead of elaborating on the topic of health and death, as the previous tradition did, offers a much broader reflection on life. It turns into a set of lessons, originating probably from common lore, about the transient nature of wealth and happiness, saying that all that is valuable in human life can so easily be snatched away. Poor men are therefore condemned only to sorrow.

“Bitterness of death” (“Kuling” 苦靈)<sup>560</sup> expresses similar feelings as it concerns popular distrust toward the efficacy of medicine and doctors (*“The daughter’s heart was not at peace, quickly she asked the doctor to fetch medicine. They say medicines can quickly help you, but who would have known that Heavenly Mother’s call would come.”* [女兒心中不安泰，忙請醫生把藥開。只說服藥好得快，誰知王母有信來.]). Additionally, it gives us some idea of the popular belief in multiple souls, and their travels after death.

[...]

三魂渺渺歸天界，     *Three tiny souls [hun] came back to heaven,*

七魄悠悠上天臺。     *Seven souls [po] unhurriedly climb to the heavenly platform.*

[...]

Moreover, it gives us a glimpse of how misery within the family, deprived of a wife and mother was perceived.

[...]

房中看娘娘不在，     *When I look into the house, my wife is not there,*

只見桌上一靈牌。     *I only see her spirit tablet standing on the table.*

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<sup>560</sup> ZGYJC: 375-376.

從今女兒無依賴， *From today children have no one to depend on,*

一家事務少安排。 *Barely anyone can put the house in order.*

女兒兩眼都哭壞， *The children cried out their eyes,*

閻王不肯放回來。 *King Yama does not let anyone come back.*

As we have seen from such traditions, the pain of loss was not only seen as a personal experience of suffering striking the closest relatives. It was also understood as a force that destroys the household, deprives children of their happy youth and even cuts off their childhood as now they are burdened with the tasks prescribed for adults.

The popular funerary songs of Eastern Sichuan, as much of the late-imperial tradition, were infused with Buddhist imagery. For example, the song “Sending Wife to Xumishan (‘Song niang songdao Xumishan 送娘送到須彌山)’<sup>561</sup> expressed the irreversible nature of death and instructed on the appropriate ways of expressing personal feelings toward the deceased.<sup>562</sup> Yet the ritual forms of transmitting one’s emotions are presented as insufficient, perhaps even disappointing, as they do not match the personal affection that bound people in their lives.

[...]

要看我娘多看眼， *I wanted to see my wife, I strained my eyes,*

以後看娘難上難。 *With time’s passage it is harder and harder.*

三月清明來祭奠， *On the third month when Qingming comes I go to offer sacrifices,*

每逢過年化紙錢。 *Every year when we meet I burn paper money.*

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<sup>561</sup> ZGYJC: 380.

<sup>562</sup> Xumishan, or Mount Meru in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jinnism signifies a mountain at the center of the world (both physical and metaphysical). In China it is also a name of one of the Buddhist sacred mountains: Xumishan shikku 須彌山石窟 in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Guyuan City, Yuanzhou District 寧夏回族自治區固原市原州區.

Although the death of a wife/mother provided the main topic of traditional funerary songs in Eastern Sichuan, the death of parents was no less important. Contrary to the songs discussed above, the latter theme, at least in Eastern Sichuan, was not touched upon in the more informal funerary songs. Instead it is the main subject of a much more structured ritual, which was performed for the collectors of the *Zhongguo geyao jicheng*, by a Chen Bingguo 陳秉國, an 81 year-old funerary specialist. Chen's song, according to editors, voiced a more literary and orthodox view on death and demonstrated a range of meanings, which were only to a degree shared by common people. Nevertheless, it is useful to quote a short passage from it in order to see the religious and emotional content with which it was charged.

"Sacrificial Song for the Funerary Ritual" ("Sangli jidian ge" 喪禮祭奠歌)<sup>563</sup>

[...]

父兮生我, *Father gave life to me,*

母兮鞠我, *Mother brought me up,*

撫我畜我, *They soothed me and fed me,*

長我育我, *They made me grow and taught me,*

顧我復我, *They looked after me and turned me [away from wrong/danger?],*

出人拊我, *They slapped so I could be a man,*

欲報之德, *They hoped I would repay [the debt to them] with virtue,*

昊天岡報。 *Parents' grace is great like heaven and earth.*<sup>564</sup>

<sup>563</sup> ZGYJC: 381-390. Here only an extract from pages 384-385.

<sup>564</sup> According to ZGYJC the song is a reference to *Book of Songs*: "Shijing 詩經, Xiaoya 小雅, Liao E 蓼莪 meaning: 指父母恩德比天高, 比地大." ZGYJC: 384. There are some differences between the original and the text of the funerary song above: 父兮生我、母兮鞠我。拊我畜我、長我育我。顧我復我、出入腹我。欲報

[...]

The ritual song expresses the Confucian idea of indebtedness to parents for one's life and any future achievements. Contrary to the previous traditions, this song does not speak about a destructive and unjust death, but about one which could be expected, and which was meant to be the experience of every living person. The words of the song thus give meaning to the ritual, strengthening its power by appealing to, explaining and directing the emotions of the people involved. What I want to underline here is that the song speaks of a vision of death, which although extremely disturbing, occurs within the established and edifying social order.

The examples given above show, in however sketchy a manner, what representations of death persisted in Eastern Sichuan popular culture, and how it was understood. We can see that the tradition of funerary songs gave voice to two images of personal suffering on the demise of a close and loved person. One type of song presents us with the figure of a male singer, who, faced with the death of his wife and fear for his orphaned children vents his desolation, helplessness and grief. The other type of song bewails the loss of parents giving voice to feelings, which though intimate were formalized within an orthodox and hierarchical vision of family and society. In this context we should now examine in what respects boatmen differed in their fears and visions of death.

### **Dying on the River: The Boatmen's Vision**

In *haozi* boatmen frequently and bluntly voiced fear for their lives. These songs treated the fundamental issue of death, an issue that was so far beyond the power of human understanding or control that one could only surrender to fortune. In contrast to the other traditions that spoke about passing away, such as the funerary songs above, these *haozi* did not lament the loss of close kin or a wife. Instead, the boatmen bemoaned their own lot and cried about their own death.

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之德、昊天罔極。 It translates as: O my father , who begat me ! O my mother, who nourished me! Ye indulged me , ye fed me, Ye held me up , ye supported me, Ye looked after me, ye never left me, Out and in ye bore me in your arms. If I would return your kindness, It is like great Heaven , illimitable[.]  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/chinese/shijing/AnoShih.html>

The main challenge for each boatman came from the dangers inherent in working on the rivers. Among them the Yangzi was particularly infamous. It was seen as difficult to go and come back to Sichuan as various natural obstacles could render a trip barely possible. “Ten thousand *li* of the Yangzi is filled with dangers” (長江萬里多艱險, “Changjiang wanli duo jianxian”) vividly expressed such feelings.<sup>565</sup>

長江萬里多艱險,                      *Ten thousand li of the Yangzi is filled with dangers,*

弄船何惧行路難。                      *Why should I fear the difficult way?*

天生一條長江道,                      *The Heavens made the Yangzi,*

我滿載貨物送出川。                      *I, loaded full with goods [try] to leave Sichuan.*

Some songs, recognizing the dangers of the way, did not maintain a comparably optimistic tone. In fact, most traditions painted the journey in tragic hues. “Calling the two winds” (喚風之二, “Huanfeng zhi er”) was a desperate prayer to the gods for aid in coming back home alive.<sup>566</sup>

王爺菩薩大些吹,                      *Revered Bodhisattva Wang blow but a bit more,*

帚帕腦殼許配你。                      *We bow to the ground and give ourselves to you,*

要想夫妻早相會,                      *Wanting to reunite with our families just a bit earlier,*

王爺菩薩來助威。                      *Revered Bodhisattva come to our aid.*

The song speaks of allegedly the most important protector god of the Sichuan boatmen, Wang Ye 王爺. Graham claimed that Wang Ye or as he appears in the song Wang Ye pusa 王爺菩薩 was a god revered by Sichuan “[boatmen] and woodcutters in the mountain

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<sup>565</sup> Chuan: 890.

<sup>566</sup> Chuan: 897.

forests.”<sup>567</sup> In the *haozi* boatmen asked him to save them from calamity and grant them safe return to their families. Apart from a self-absorbed fear for one’s own life, we can see here a similar sense of insecurity to that expressed in the funerary songs. The singers of work songs wanted to be reunited with their families as that meant that they would not leave them abandoned and orphaned. Yet, since they saw that it was completely beyond their power to ensure a secure passage home, they appealed to the gods for protection.

Other sources give further information as to the meaning of the cult of Wang Ye. In the first decades of the twentieth century David C. Graham observed that:

Demons are supposed to fear blood, and in many ceremonies of exorcism blood is sprinkled to frighten them away. When boatmen are about to begin a journey, they kill a chicken, offer it in worship to Wang Yeh, the boatmen’s god, and sprinkle some of the blood on the front of the boat. Blood is also sprinkled when a new business is opened, when a business is reopened after New Year, or when a new house or other building has been finished. All this is to exorcise demons. Other ways to frighten away demons are to throw *tsai pao*, which are round biscuits, to sprinkle holy water, and to throw uncooked rice.<sup>568</sup>

Isabella Bird during her voyage on the Yangzi probably in 1896 or 1897, attested to similar practices among Yangzi boatmen: “my boat’s crew made offerings and vows at their favorite temples, and on the first evening [of the trip] they slew a fowl as an offering to their river god, and smeared its blood over the boat-sweep and the fore part of the boat.”<sup>569</sup> Even though, Bird was quite ignorant of Chinese popular religious rituals and at times expressed disgust with Chinese religiosity these notes are of great value to us.

A very similar cult to Wang Ye grew around a locality god (*tudigong* 土地公, or as it appears in the text *tudipusa* 土地菩薩, a local Bodhisattva) of the Thousand Servants Gate (Qiansimen), called Chicken Feather God. Many sung or narrated traditions included reference to his powers. “Shuo Chongqing” mentions him in the following way:

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<sup>567</sup> Graham: 186.

<sup>568</sup> Graham: 128.

<sup>569</sup> Bird: 117.

千厮門”雞毛土地靈得很，*Qiansimen*, [where] the efficacy of Chicken Feather God is great,

還雞愿燒香火要數船民。*And with chickens and incense the wishes of many boatmen go.*<sup>570</sup>

Residing by Qiansimen, Chicken Feather God was especially revered by the boatmen, who burned incense to him. In exchange he was considered to bestow protection on those who traveled on the Jialing River. The name of the god was linked to belief in the power of chicken blood and involved sacrifices requesting his aid – killing a fowl, smearing the stone to which a boat was moored with its blood and attaching to it some of its feathers.<sup>571</sup> This practice seems to have been widespread and popular enough to be worth mentioning by late-imperial geographers who indicated Chicken Feather God’s temple and stone on the 1886 map of Chongqing (see: Figure 14 ).<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> ZGYJC: 6. For an analysis of the song, see: Chapter 4.

<sup>571</sup> A short hagiographic story of this god can be found in the collection of myths and folktales from the Chongqing area, see: “Jimao tudi: yihuangshulang xiucheng zhengguo” “雞毛土地：—黃鼠狼修成正果”, *Ba Yu*: 63-64.

<sup>572</sup> Interestingly 1939 *Baxianzhi*, anyway being very laconic about locality cults in Chongqing does not mention this cult. It notes only three, which had shrines within city walls: Zong tudi 總土地, Sanceng tudi 三層土地 and Ai tudi 矮土地. *Baxianzhi*, 1939: 787-788.



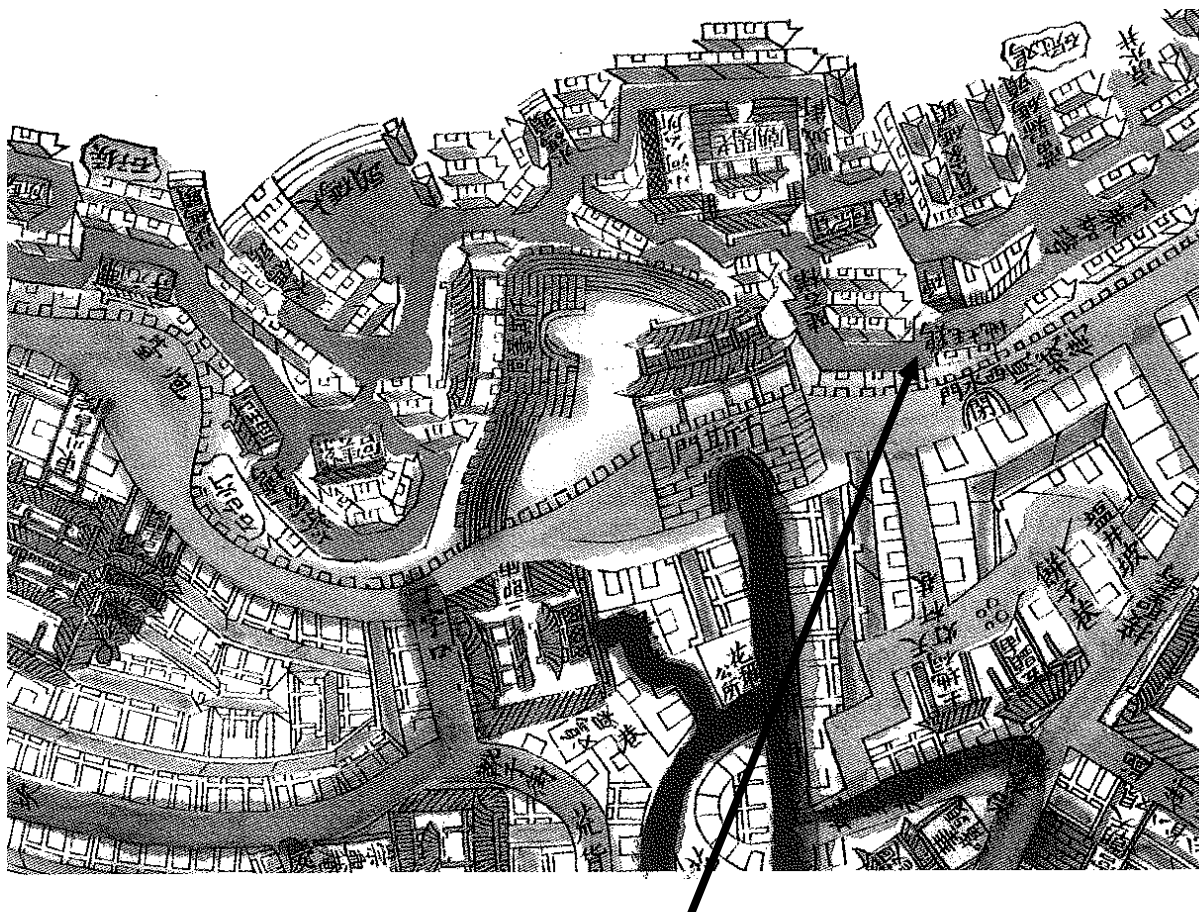


Figure 14: The arrow points to the Chicken Feather God Temple (*Jimao tudi* 鷄毛土地). According to the late-Qing cartographer, it was outside the city walls, in close proximity to the Qiansimen. Its shrine could have been 'built into' the outer wall of the city. Source: Full Map of the Chongqing Prefecture, *Lao Chengmen*: 50.

From these above-mentioned traditions, as well as travel writing and ethnographic work, we can see that it was not only in work songs, but also in religious practice that boatmen expressed their feelings of insecurity and dependence on supernatural forces to grant them safe passage. Nevertheless, from among the *haozi* that have survived till today, only very few express such feelings. More frequently, work songs give way to an overwhelming and imminent fear of death, without hope of being saved. This feeling was compounded with another apparently horrifying idea – that of having one's body eaten, thus leading to full bodily obliteration. This trope was reproduced in more or less developed form both in songs and, as we will see later, in local myths from Chongqing. We can see it most clearly in the *haozi* called "Die and be eaten by shrimp and fish" (死了去喂魚蝦, "Sile quwei yu xia").<sup>573</sup>

<sup>573</sup> ZGYJC: 26.

日食河中水，	<i>It's river water I eat every day,</i>
夜宿沙壩中。	<i>It's sand on the banks that is my nighttime bed.</i>
妻守有夫寡，	<i>The wife is guarded like a widow,</i>
夫伏無罪法。	<i>The husband hides though he is no bandit.</i>
吃的鬼魂食，	<i>I eat food of the ghosts,</i>
穿的疤重疤。	<i>I dress a scar on a scar.</i>
病了由天命，	<i>When I'm sick, it's my destiny,</i>
死了喂魚蝦。	<i>To die and be eaten by shrimp and fish.</i>

Death is pictured as the conclusion to a series of deprivations that define the boatmen's life. In fact, the life of the tracker or rower who is the hero of the song consists only of assaults on his physical and social existence; attacks that exhaust him and his feeling of self-respect. Firstly, because he never sees his family and never has his own place to live in, he is pictured as a bandit-like figure. He also has to endure hunger, as his diet is compared to one of 'hungry ghosts' (*guihun shi* 鬼魂食). This metaphor needs some explanation as it is definitive for the meaning of the song, casting it in an even grimmer light. Myron Cohen explained that hungry ghosts were: "[spirits] who remained among the living for longer periods included those who at the time of their deaths had been socially isolated; they became the "hungry ghosts" without descendants to worship them, and without ancestral tablets for their souls."<sup>574</sup> The widespread belief that a hungry ghost was one of the most miserable creatures wandering the world gave power to the metaphor employed in *haozi*, since boatmen were often seen as impoverished vagabonds.

Even stronger images of misery are employed when describing a boatman's body and physical pain. It was covered with scars and bruises, the outcome of excruciating ox-like

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<sup>574</sup> Myron L. Cohen. "Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion" in Rawski and Watson, 1988: 190-191.

work on the rocky paths. Yet what is more interesting for us is the representation of a body that never receives care and which degenerates the moment the boatman contracts any disease. Sickness brings loss of hope that a tracker can finish his journey, as he either will be abandoned or will continue to work with the increasingly bleak hope of reaching home. His end is death; not the death of a human but that of the beast. His body falls in the water and there remains to be consumed by scavenging animals, which quickly make it vanish. The last point is especially significant. The tracker's grave in the stomachs of mere beasts denies him any trace of the humanity he so much strives for.

The idea that boatmen dropped dead while working and were not buried occupied a central position in a number of songs. As we have seen at the beginning of the chapter appropriate burial was of great importance among Han people as an expression of filial piety, ensuring the happiness of ancestors and granting an auspicious life to the living descendants. In portraying themselves as people without graves or denied appropriate burial, boatmen were in fact making a statement not only about the dangers of their work but also about their lowly and disreputable social standing. The *Haozi* "Pulling the boat and perish without grave" (船拉二死了沒有埋, "Chuanla er sile meiyou mai") gives clear expression to these accumulated fears and feelings:<sup>575</sup>

川江水，滾滾來，                      *Yangzi waters roll and roll,*

船工拉灘又跑岩。                      *Trackers break through rapids, jump across cliffs.*

拖兒匠埋了沒有死，                      *The miner is buried, when still alive,*<sup>576</sup>

船拉二死了沒有埋。                      *The tracker though dead doesn't have a grave.*

Even compared to such a dangerous and also disreputable profession as miner, a trackers' life appears bleak and miserable. Being denied burial, even in spite of the hardships undergone during work, simply exacerbated their sense of worthlessness.

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<sup>575</sup> *Chuan*: 906.

<sup>576</sup> *Touerjiang* 拖兒匠: Chongqing dialect: indicates sluggish work of pulling buckets with coal; coal miners. *Chuan*: 906.

According to Graham, people in Sichuan believed that tragic consequences would spring from lack of appropriate burial or even from broken ritual communication. Since his findings are directly relevant to our discussion of the imagined afterlife of boatmen and their fears of death, we will need to quote them here at length.

We have seen that if the offerings to, and worship of, the dead ancestors are discontinued because the living descendants are unfilial or because there are no more descendants, then the deceased ancestors become hungry and angry, and vengeful, and inflict much pain and harm upon the descendants and on other people. In short, they become demons.

Another kind of a demon is the soul of a person who has died a violent or unnatural death. This includes the souls of people who have been killed by falling over a cliff, who have been stabbed or shot so that they bleed to death, whose throats have been cut, who have been drowned, who died by hanging, or of women who died during childbirth. The only way that the demon of a person who has died a violent death can escape the undesirable demon condition and be reborn as a human being is to cause some other person to die the same way that he did. There are many stories of demons trying to cause the deaths of other people.

A *tiao chin kuei* is a demon who died by hanging and who seeks to be reborn as a human by causing some other person to die by hanging, generally by committing suicide. A *mo chin kuei* is a demon who died by cutting his throat or having his throat cut, and who endeavors to cause others to die a similar death. A water demon is one who drowned in a river, stream, or lake and now tries to drown other people. The rescue of a drowning person may anger the demon who is trying to drown that person, and the demon may then drown the rescuer. For this reason many Chinese and non-Chinese in West China are reluctant to rescue a person from drowning. There is also the demon of a woman who died in childbirth, who endeavors to cause other women to die in childbirth.<sup>577</sup>

Graham's comments are consistent with the later systematization of the Chinese demon world made by Myron L. Cohen. Cohen pointed to the existence of "beggar-ghosts" which

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<sup>577</sup> Graham: 123-124.

were released every year from hell, and various “hungry ghosts,” which had neither descendants nor ancestral tablets. He also discussed various harmful spirits such as “*li-kuei*” (厲鬼, *ligui*, dead by drowning or suicide); they were particularly punished since their “death [was] not only violent but often resulted in the loss of the body itself.”<sup>578</sup> Therefore, lack of memorialization and discontinuation of ritual practice by one’s descendants turned the souls of the dead into miserable demons condemned to interminable banishment. Such spirits were not only locked into a circle of suffering, but also brought disturbance to the living, exposing them to inauspicious influences.<sup>579</sup>

Death in the river in the prime of one’s life also had other consequences. If we consider the orthodox idea of ancestry, where care, respect and love for the parents were seen as fundamental elements of the social and cultural order, failing to uphold one’s duties cast premature death at work in a different light. In this context we should look at the work song “Death comes in the river; in it are buried the dead” (河裡死來河裡埋, “*Heli silai heli mai*”)<sup>580</sup>, which focused on such multiple failure, where a boatman lamented his inability not only to be a father, but also a benevolent ancestor.

河裡死來河裡埋,	<i>Death comes in the river; in it are buried the dead,</i>
去跟魚蝦作陪伴。	<i>[And you] go away in the company of fish and shrimp.</i>
你娃娃死得好嫩蒜,	<i>Your baby child dies being so tender,</i>
老漢我是死了沒有埋。	<i>And I, an old man, die never to be buried.</i>

The juxtaposition of a child’s demise, which though unjust still contains within it an inherent humanity, and the old man’s death that leaves him with the beasts is very strong. It underlines the loss of traces of humanity expressed by the boatmen in their songs and a profound sense of exclusion from society, which attached so much importance to dying in an appropriate manner.

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<sup>578</sup> Myron L. Cohen: 190-191.

<sup>579</sup> Conversely, appropriate burial in an auspicious location connected with meticulous practice of spirit veneration were considered the best ways to ensure prosperity to one’s family and community.

<sup>580</sup> *Chuan*: 907.

It was not only the river and its creatures that trackers dreaded. If that was the case, we could assume that these oral traditions were in fact grievances voiced to complain about the dangerous and life threatening environmental conditions. Obviously, as we have seen previously, this layer of interpretation is valid; but it is also insufficient.<sup>581</sup> Being abandoned like a beast of burden and not cared for by either colleagues or employers runs contrary to basic precepts of boatmen culture: precepts of brotherhood and mutual help. These two elementary values, however, were challenged by nothing more than the very organization of labor. Although our evidence is sparse, we can see that the painful life suffered by the boatmen had a source in the economic exploitation exercised by the bosses. The song “The heartless headman drops you on the river bank” (頭佬狠心丟江邊, “Toulao henxin diu jiangbian”)<sup>582</sup> attests to this way of thinking:

哥兒下水去解纜,     *Brothers leave the port to go down river,*

受涼着寒心不安。     *Suffering winter cold fills their hearts with anxiety.*

从此疾病把身纏,     *From then disease pesters the body,*

頭佬狠心丟江邊。     *The heartless headman drops you on the river bank.*

卷走橈片淹死郎。     *And the flood water sweeps you dead away.*

Looking at this example, we can get a much more complex picture of the issue of boatmen's death. It was not caused simply by the destructive work and the dangers of nature, which handicapped workers with either diseases or injuries. The organization of labor and inexplicably immoral exploitation (as the boatmen saw it) compounded with the cold-heartedness of the bosses, menaced their lives and increased the sense of vulnerability. Far more important here and more significant in all these traditions is not the issue of blame for any particular cause of death, but the notion of unusual cruelty and injustice linked with these deaths. In other words, the main focus fell not on being particularly exploited, but on

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<sup>581</sup> See: Chapter 5.

<sup>582</sup> *Chuan*: 908.

suffering dehumanizing injustice and maltreatment after death – not having a proper funeral ceremony but instead having one's body devoured or scavenged upon.

We can see a number of interesting elements in each of these grim songs: firstly what boatmen saw as causes of their tragic end; secondly, compared to other songs, the reversed gender relations, where husbands were dying and abandoning their wives and children; thirdly, the search for supernatural help in danger; fourthly, the fear that death will bring even more tragic pain in the afterlife.

In relation to the causes, both the conditions of work (the difficult natural environment and exploitative labor practices) created a feeling of vulnerability and produced the sense of life-endangering work. In fact, the two elements were compounded and worked together to make boatmen's lives miserable, as the environment would not be seen as so harsh if it were not for the treatment received from the bosses. It worked the same the other way round. Much more striking here is the way death was spelled out in contrast to other popular images of passing away, as expressed in Eastern Sichuan popular culture.

As we have seen on the basis of funerary songs the most common images of death were connected with the diseases that struck women after childbearing. The physical degradation of women, wives and mothers that led to death was perceived as incomprehensible, impossible to stop with any means at hand, and emotionally devastating for the family of the deceased. The songs were implicitly sung by men who expressed their grief and desperation as their families were broken and all the duties of maintaining the household and bringing up children fell on their shoulders. In this context, boatmen *haozi* overturn the discourse of death. Firstly, *haozi*, those dealing with the trackers' and rowers' tragic lot, were also sung by men, but instead of focusing on the death of the wife they spoke about the imminent death of the father/husband/man figure. Secondly, they did not mourn the passing away of a real person, an event that had actually happened, but anticipated the death of the singer. In this way they produced an image of an imagined death and the imagined consequences of it, which were very much similar to those expressed by the funerary song: lack of control, being attacked by a disease, bodily degradation, and impending death. There were also similarities in social consequences: orphaned children, an abandoned husband and property left unattended. I would not go as far as to claim that boatmen presented themselves as

occupying the social role of women. Nevertheless, reversing the gender roles and assuming the same vulnerable position as that of childbearing women in other Sichuan traditions could be read as an expression of profound disempowerment on the part of the boatmen.<sup>583</sup>

It is indeed the idea of disempowerment, vulnerability and fragility that comes to the fore in Eastern Sichuan *haozi*. Boatmen similarly to the male/father figures from the funerary songs looked for supernatural help in fending off danger, pain and disease. Contrary to the former traditions, *haozi* bespoke a much deeper belief in the possibility of the gods' help and their songs do not express such a strong level of disappointment. It is hard here to propose an answer as to the source of this divergence. From the material presented, the only difference that can be pointed out is that funerary songs refer to grand cults, whereas boatmen typically sang about their own local and professional gods, such as Wang Ye and Chicken Feather God (Jimao tudi). In boatmen's work songs these gods appeared to be more efficacious (*ling* 靈) in matters of life and death and thus seemed more reliable than the sanctioned and imperially supported cults.<sup>584</sup>

Lastly, it was the image of boatmen's death that seemed really horrifying to singers of *haozi* since it united in itself both social injustice and ritual impurity. As was presented at the beginning of the chapter, funerals and appropriate burial were seen as fundamental social and religious acts, which expressed filial piety and which ensured good fortune both for the deceased in the afterlife and for the living. The way a funeral was performed and what ritual practices were chosen also denoted the social position of the family of the deceased. Lack of burial, conversely, was depicted as dangerous for the community and horrifying for the one who passed away as in popular imagination it equated him with outcasts and criminals and in religious terms with demons and monsters. Despoiling of the body or its obliteration was often considered to have consequences in the afterlife as one was supposed to be reborn in the same shape as in death. To die and have one's body abandoned to the workings of

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<sup>583</sup> If we accept the definition that gender pronounced predominantly power relations like class and race, see: Joan Wallach Scott. 1999. *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised Edition. New York: Columbia University Press: 28-50.

<sup>584</sup> Such an interpretation is in line with the findings of historians and anthropologists of religion. Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller. "Introduction: Gods and Society in China" in Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds. *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1-36. Stephan Feuchtwang. 2001. *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press: 84-89, 96-105. Similar logic fuels for example cult of saints in Christian Catholicism and Orthodoxy: Stephen Wilson. 1985. *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-53.



elements or to “fish and shrimp”, which would eat it, equated boatmen with convicts and those who committed suicide – people seen as having no respect for their ancestry and posterity and therefore not worthy of any respect.

What is characteristic of the *haozi* is that the discussion of afterlife consequences following such a tragic death is not rendered in the religious sense, even though we can assume that it was implicit. Rather, the question of maltreatment, which led to such a state of affairs, comes to the fore. It was the brutality of the bosses and lack of brotherhood that should bind co-workers together that was blamed. Lack of humanity on the side of the employer was pointed out as the main reason why boatmen were stripped of their human traits and thus condemned to lowly life, painful death and sorrow in the afterlife.

## Conclusion

The *haozi* that described the death of a boatman have to be seen in the broader context of the death rites and of the popular traditions that grew around the funerary ritual. As the orthodox tradition was preoccupied with the appropriacy of expressions of filial piety built on the notions of status, respect, love, the popular tradition focused on the grief and pain of the husbands whose wives’ lives were shortened by disease. In contrast to these traditions, boatmen sang their own funerary songs when they were still alive. Their meaning was that of grief and pain, but not for the death of a close person but from the possibility of their own death. These quite particular *haozi* voiced two fundamental fears of the Sichuan trackers and rowers, which were hidden within the phrase “to die and be eaten by fish and shrimp.” The first one was that of weakness and vulnerability faced with the difficult natural environment where they worked, and with the cruel bosses who treated them no better than beasts; and also with their families, for whom they were not able to take appropriate care. The second fear was that of death and obliteration, which implied breaking the ritual and social bonds inscribed in funerary rituals as well as an extremely bleak existence in the afterlife – that of the hungry ghost. *Haozi* also point in a different interpretative direction. The songs about death were first and foremost articulating the dismal position boatmen saw themselves as occupying in society. If, in their words, even their bosses could deny them a basic burial, the right of any Chinese person, it meant that they saw themselves cast beyond the boundaries of human society. Obviously such rhetoric was built upon exaggeration, since there is no

proof that the bodies of Sichuan boat people were abandoned without burial (there is evidence against that view); but it was the overstatement that gave such songs their meaning, which has to be read as a voice of protest against penury, loneliness and marginalization.

# CONCLUSION

Boatmen's culture developed at a time when late imperial society was undergoing a period of profound crisis. This crisis did not result in the outright collapse of existing structures, but rather a gradual undermining of the traditional agrarian economy, with its social, cultural and political codes. In Eastern Sichuan, if not all along the Yangzi region, the emerging role of the cities and of trade as the main producers of wealth and power brought forward new social groups, which questioned and pushed at the previous order. The river workers were hardly among the 'gainers' in these novel conditions. Although the very existence of the profession of boatman and the fact that so many people flocked to the river towns in order to take up this work attests to its relative appeal, it is beyond question that to be a tracker or a rower meant being dangerously close to the bottom of the social ladder. It is in this context of growing prosperity, social disruption and increased inequality that we should see boatmen's culture. Therefore, after reconstructing in detail the social history of the Sichuan boatmen and the ways in which we can read their traditions, this thesis has outlined three major themes or perspectives created by the boatmen and voiced in their work songs: the way they saw their world, their social position vis-à-vis other social groups, and their understanding of death.

In Chapter 1, I placed Sichuan river workers in the context of the regional and supra-regional history of late-Qing and Republican China. I demonstrated that from the beginning of the nineteenth century, concurrently with the rapid growth of rural and urban populations in Eastern Sichuan, there was a surge in the number of boats connecting the ever-expanding centers of production and consumption. As Sichuan became strongly connected to the eastern provinces via the Yangzi, the number of trackers and rowers grew and their geographical scope expanded. Even though these changes positively affected the labor market as more and more workers were needed, they did not translate into an improvement of the social position of workers. We have seen that to be a boatman not only meant being dependent on secret society networks for a job, but also suffering low wages, bad quality food rations, and exploitative practices on the part of the bosses. Additionally, due to the hazardous environment and use of traditional technology, the external conditions of work

rendered the boatmen's job difficult, dangerous and degrading. It has been also underlined that traditional river transportation, which demanded a large number of trackers and rowers, did not cease with the introduction of steamships or with the establishment of the People's Republic, as many Chinese historians have claimed. In fact, the profession lasted at least till the 1960s and on some lesser rivers even longer.

As the profession of boatman faded away, their traditions began to attract increasing interest on the part of ethnographers and folklorists. In Chapter 2, I presented and analyzed the choices and achievements of Chinese folklore research, ethnography and ethnomusicology, one of which led to the establishment of practical definitions of the work songs (*haozi*) and their collection and edition in anthologies. Later, while discussing these anthologies of work songs, which provide the main sources of this thesis, I pointed out their respective characteristics and the ideological choices, which informed them. While we can see these collections as valuable and generally reliable sources relating to Chinese popular culture, we should not lose sight of the fact that they were informed by quite persistent notions of local patriotism, and a demand for socialist reform of lower class culture, focusing especially on eliminating vulgar and superstitious content.

Chapter 3 engaged with Sichuan *haozi* not as text but as a genre of music, a system of communication between boatmen and an integral part of the distinctive soundscape of the rivers of Sichuan. Here I explained how work songs were constructed and how workers communicated using them. What is especially worth underlining is the fact that these songs were flexible and adjustable tools and that each river valley had its own set of musical traditions unique to the local conditions. Boatmen *haozi* were not a form of art (though that is what they are now seen as) but indispensable elements of Sichuan river-labor. Without them, trackers and rowers would not have been able to coordinate their movements while scattered along the tow ropes often very far from the boat. Equally, it would have been impossible for the head-trackers to warn of danger on the outlying paths or for the pilots and rowers to warn of changing river currents. These functions of the boatmen's work songs were a more essential element than the transmission of text, but as far as we know, barely any *haozi* were lacking in textual content. We should thus see these two elements as inalienable: *haozi* were both tools of work and channels of transmission for culturally meaningful contents.

Chapters four, five and six are devoted to reading the meanings inscribed in the boatmen's work songs. In Chapter 4, I have analyzed the way river laborers constructed and understood the world where they lived and worked. Issues of geographical knowledge, memory and aesthetics were of primary importance. Sichuan boatmen possessed outstanding knowledge of places, and within the songs they inscribed mnemonic techniques, which enabled them to memorize, recall and use such knowledge at work. At the same time, *haozi* were not simply maps that existed in memory, as particular places were described, compared and connected with images, which reveal to us the cultural and social world in which boatmen lived and often enjoyed themselves. Boatmen did not absorb much of the aesthetic code formulated by literary elites, nor did they retain a great deal from their peasant origins. They circulated mostly in the realm of concrete objects and images, which could be confirmed through experience. The picture of Sichuan cities and river valleys we examined here, show a world filled mostly with brothels, taverns, markets, landing places and slum districts – all important constituents of the workers' world. In the same way, boatmen showed a lack of respect for most of the local history, especially the narratives developed by literary elites. Although many of their own narratives can be traced back even to late-antiquity, barely any consciousness of these origins existed. Instead, popular histories were jumbled together with more current images to convey a meaning not originally inscribed in them. Studying such sometimes awkward combinations can be highly instructive. Through them, we can see that workers drew on various traditions, not being interested in history per se, but in rendering a valid picture of their own world.

In Chapter 5, I dealt with the issues of self-representation and assumed social position boatmen occupied in the Sichuan world. There, I show that river workers bemoaned their lowly social status as a way of resisting exploitation and abuse on the part of the bosses and secret society 'uncles' who determined their work conditions. Taking James Scott's idea of "hidden transcript" I treat their grudges and the images of misery they drew, as voices of opposition, dissatisfaction, and resistance. The boatmen, however, did not confine themselves to simply lamenting their conditions. They also produced images that ennobled them and gave meaning to the social status they occupied. The underlying value that allowed them to aim for such transposition was brotherhood – boatmen thought of themselves as bound like brothers, as if with blood ties, equivalent to knights-errant and

righteous bandits. This notion was borrowed from popular storytelling and the operatic tradition with which they had limited but quite persistent contact. It was to an even greater extent a loan from the Gelaohui culture, which emphasized brotherhood, heroism and common cause in the chaotic male society of Eastern Sichuan.

Chapter 6 discusses the image of death as a determiner of social status. There, I analyzed the boatmen's visions of their own death against the backdrop of the late-imperial, republican elite and popular funerary traditions from Eastern Sichuan. The chapter demonstrates that the trackers' and rowers' particular vision of dying, which involved lamenting their own impending death and visualizing their own bodies being devoured by river animals, was a method of protesting against their perceived very low social position. Boatmen pictured themselves as un-filial and inhuman as they could not attend to family duties and were condemned, after death, to becoming hungry ghosts because they could not be properly buried. What lay behind these outbursts was a strong perception of vulnerability and lack of control over one's destiny. As in the case of the complaints about their social condition, which were discussed in Chapter 5, the boatmen's visions of death have a strong sense of accusation directed at their superiors – the cruel and inhuman bosses, who take workers' humanity away from them. What is most unusual about the *haozi* treatment of death is that when put into the context of other funerary songs from Eastern Sichuan, we can see that they voice the boatmen's vulnerability through the transfer of gender roles. As most funerary laments bewailed the post-natal death of mothers, boatmen work songs bemoan the death of males/fathers, using similar images and vocabulary.

A number of observations can be made about boatmen's culture in general. Firstly, even though they were quite a new group, which grew with the spread of commercialization and capitalism, they did not create a new culture or strive for one in any sense. On the contrary, they negotiated their position through various existing layers of cultural imagery, whether religious or moralistic, selecting from it and infusing it with their own values. The choices they made and the manner in which they shaped their own image was highly original and attests to a high level of cultural sensibility among these otherwise destitute workers. The way Sichuan boatmen engaged with culture is also highly indicative, and leads us to enquire about other lower-class groups of Chinese society occupied in non-industrial sectors of the

economy. Certainly, much more research is needed to obtain a full picture, but we can put forward some general comments.

Secondly, through their claims to aesthetic sensibility and endorsement of their own interpretations of morality and history, Sichuan workers sought to appropriate their physical and social space. At the same time there was a tension between this sense of belonging and their self-representation as outsiders. Boatmen affiliated themselves with the images of outcasts that were common among secret society members and popular in the oral arts. Playing on the image of the outsider was a consequence of their inadequacies as a professional group. One of the main issues here was being un-filial and uncaring toward their wives, children and elders. Boatmen could neither cater to the needs of their families by providing food and money nor be in a position to perform appropriate rituals for the happiness of their ancestors. Picturing themselves as people without family and friends, they often felt isolated from the broader community or even outcasts without any community to belong to. The result of this condition was a prevalent sense of loss of humanity and thus of being equivalent to beasts. Lack of humanity meant that one was outside the ritual, moral and emotional structures that were conducive to the community's existence. This is not to say that boatmen were really like beasts (as many Chinese and Western observers thought as they watched them work), but that they expressed a feeling of being no more than beasts.

Thirdly, what divided boatmen most from the mainstream of society was an acute sense of being exploited. The apparently inhuman conditions of work and the brutality of the bosses constantly led them to voice their discontent or engage in representing themselves as the most destitute people of China. This image is especially interesting if placed within the context of the revolutionary tradition in Chinese historiography. Although clearly a form of resistance and a reminder to themselves and the world of their conditions, boatman laments did not have any broader political meaning. They did not call for struggle, rebellion or revolution. I would claim rather that they eased adjustment to difficult work and social position and made these relatively tolerable through free expression, as opposed to suppressing them within the boatmen's minds. This explanation seems valid if we see *haozi* not as literal descriptions of the Eastern Sichuan labor reality, but as products of culture both embedded in a discourse of poverty and productive within this discourse. Boatmen shaped

their own vision partly on the image of other lower class groups, but they also managed to create a valid picture of their own professional group and perhaps one of the few images of pre-industrial workers in Qing China.

Finally, we should see the history of Eastern Sichuan boat people in a broader scope than simply that of its immediate locality. River workers such as trackers, rowers, and sailors were widespread in late-Qing and republican China, as with sluggish development of road and railway networks, rivers and coastal waters were still the most reliable routes for transportation. Obviously there were large differences between the regions when it came to vessels used, organization of work, formation of the shipping companies, available capital, and type of shipped goods etc. Boatmen from disparate regions such as the Pearl River Delta, the Grand Canal, the Lower and Middle Yangzi, the Yellow River or the Fujian-Zhejiang Coast also spoke different languages, ate different foods and believed in different local gods. Nevertheless, looking at Sichuan boat people, whose oral traditions are either the most developed or simply the most accessible, we can see strong analogies with the groups mentioned above. All of them were considered to be on the margins of society, brutalized and locked in poverty, bound by clandestine modes of social organization and existing within the realm of oral culture. Yet by looking at such groups, we can access an important part of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese history, which uncomfortably slips away from institution-based research. The story of the Sichuan boatmen epitomizes the transformation of Chinese economy, society and culture, which led to the growth of new social groups, to striking inequality, and a need for organizational and cultural development that would enable people to sustain an acceptable level of existence in a quickly changing reality. Boatmen, like many other pre-industrial working class groups of that period did not try to overturn this social system, which gave them one of the least privileged positions. Instead they tried to adjust to and manipulate the world they lived in within the limits of their understanding. Even more significantly, they tried to resist the injustices connected with their lowly status and made their own claims to the social and physical space of their work and residence. We can thus read boatmen's *haozi* as a voice of opposition to proletarianization and displacement; as an effort at asserting and regaining self-worth.



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## Recordings

Westchinesische Phonogramme, aufg. V. Herrn Konsul WEISS, Chengtu, Szechuan, 1912, Übertragen am: 05.05.99.

1. Walze 1, Beim Stromabwärts-Rudern, Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 1. 02.20 min, 165 U/min.
2. Walze 2, Forts. V 1) Beim Ueberschreiten der Stromschnellen (Seitenruder), Neue Kopie, Band 1, ID 2, 02.23 min, 165 U/min..
3. Walze 3, Beim Stromabwärts-Rudern. (Einzelruder), Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 3, 02:23 min, 165 U/min.
4. Walze 4, "Rufen (Locken) des Windes, Hissen der Segel", Neue Kopie, Band 1, ID 4, 02:31 min, 162 U/min.
5. Walze 5, Gesang der Ruder auf dem Drachenboot (Boote zum Drachenfest, die mit kurzen Rudern vorwärts gestossen werden), Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 5, 02:17 min, 163 U/min.
6. Walze 6, Gesang am Land, Neue Kopie, Band 1, ID 6, 02:07 min, 164 U/min.
7. Walze 7, Beim Rudern im stillen Wasser. Vorsänger mit Chor. (Der Voränger improvisiert, anknüpfend am eine Tagesbegebenheit), Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 7, ? min, 164 U/min.
8. Walze 9, Chinesische Soldaten in Chengtu. Europ. Gesänge mit chines. Text a) "Alle Vöglein sind schon da" b) "Chinesische Nationalhymne", 1911-1912 entstanden. Band 1, ID 8, 02:24 min, 165 U/min.

9. Walze 8, Hsi-fan-Stämme (tibetische Mischlinge) Anfeuernde Rufe bei der Jagd. Am Schluß: Zurückrufen (Locken) der Hunde, Alte Kopie, Band 1, ID 9, 02:20 min, 165 U/min.

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Available also on:

1<sup>st</sup> part: "The Source" 源頭 *yuantou*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=THJiApJQg28;>

2<sup>nd</sup> part: "All his Life" 生平 *shengping*:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd\\_andY1KUk&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd_andY1KUk&feature=related)

3<sup>rd</sup> part: "Change" 變遷 *qian bianqian*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPNJX8dvHg0&feature=related>

4<sup>th</sup> part: "Recollections" 回憶 *huiyi*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNtXGBmbJ9I&feature=related>

5<sup>th</sup> part: "Crossing the Sea" 過海 *guohai*:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epKbcU6mCtU&feature=related.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epKbcU6mCtU&feature=related)

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